S. S. VAN DINE

THE CANARY MURDER CASE

THE GREENE MURDER CASE

THE BISHOP MURDER CASE

~~Elmwood Hanger~~
~~232 Wilton Avenue~~
~~Somerville Mass.~~

A PHILO VANCE WEEK-END

containing three mystery novels

by
S. S. VAN DINE

THE "CANARY" MURDER CASE
THE GREENE MURDER CASE
THE BISHOP MURDER CASE

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THE "CANARY" MURDER CASE

INTRODUCTORY

For many years I was the personal attorney and constant companion of Mr. Philo Vance; and this period covered the four years during which Mr. John F.-X. Markham, Vance's closest friend, was District Attorney of New York. As a result it was my privilege to be a spectator of what I believe was the most amazing series of criminal cases that ever passed before the eyes of a young lawyer. Indeed, the grim dramas I witnessed during that period constitute one of the most astonishing secret documents in American police history.

Of these dramas Vance was the central character. By an analytical and interpretative process which, as far as I know, has never before been applied to criminal activities, he succeeded in solving many of the important crimes on which both the police and the District Attorney's office had hopelessly fallen down.

Due to my peculiar relations with Vance it happened that not only did I participate in all the cases with which he was connected, but I was also present at most of the informal discussions concerning them which took place between him and the District Attorney; and, being of methodical temperament, I kept a complete record of them. It is fortunate that I performed this gratuitous labor of accumulation and transcription, for now that circumstances have rendered possible my making the cases public, I am able

to present them in full detail and with all their various sidelights and succeeding steps.

In another volume—"The Benson Murder Case"—I have related how Vance happened to become involved in criminal investigation, and have also set forth the unique analytic methods of crime detection by which he solved the problem of Alvin Benson's mysterious murder.

The present chronicle has to do with Vance's solution of the brutal murder of Margaret Odell—a *cause célèbre* which came to be known as the "Canary" murder. The strangeness, the daring, the seeming impenetrability of the crime marked it as one of the most singular and astonishing cases in New York's police annals; and had it not been for Philo Vance's participation in its solution, I firmly believe it would have remained one of the great unsolved mysteries of this country.

S. S. Van Dine.

New York.

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CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

PHILO VANCE

JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM
District Attorney of New York County.

MARGARET ODELL (THE "CANARY")
Famous Broadway beauty and ex-*Follies* girl, who was mysteriously murdered in her apartment.

AMY GIBSON
Margaret Odell's maid.

CHARLES CLEAVER
A man-about-town.

KENNETH SPOTSWOODE
A manufacturer.

LOUIS MANNIX
An importer.

DR. AMBROISE LINDQUIST
A fashionable neurologist.

TONY SKEEL
A professional burglar.

WILLIAM ELMER JESSUP
Telephone operator.

HARRY SPIVELY
Telephone operator.

ALYS LA FOSSE
A musical-comedy actress.

WILEY ALLEN
A gambler.

POTTS
A street-cleaner.

AMOS FEATHERGILL
Assistant District Attorney.

WILLIAM M. MORAN
Commanding Officer of the Detective Bureau.

ERNEST HEATH
Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau.

SNITKIN
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

GUILFOYLE
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

BURKE
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

TRACY
Detective assigned to District Attorney's office.

DEPUTY-INSPECTOR CONRAD BRENNER
Burglar-tools expert.

CAPTAIN DUBOIS
Finger-print expert.

DETECTIVE BELLAMY
Finger-print expert.

PETER QUACKENBUSH
Official photographer.

DR. DOREMUS
Medical Examiner.

SWACKER
Secretary to the District Attorney.

CURRIE
Vance's valet.

CHAPTER I

THE "CANARY"

In the offices of the Homicide Bureau of the Detective Division of the New York Police Department, on the third floor of the Police Headquarters building in Center Street, there is a large steel filing cabinet; and within it, among thousands of others of its kind, there reposes a small green index-card on which is typed: "*ODELL, MARGARET.* 184 *West* 71*st Street. Sept.* 10. *Murder: Strangled about* 11 *p. m. Apartment ransacked. Jewelry stolen. Body found by Amy Gibson, maid.*"

Here, in a few commonplace words, is the bleak, unadorned statement of one of the most astonishing crimes in the police annals of this country—a crime so contradictory, so baffling, so ingenious, so unique, that for many days the best minds of the Police Department and the District Attorney's office were completely at a loss as to even a method of approach. Each line of investigation only tended to prove that Margaret Odell could not possibly have been murdered. And yet, huddled on the great silken davenport in her living-room lay the girl's strangled body, giving the lie to so grotesque a conclusion.

The true story of this crime, as it eventually came to light after a disheartening period of utter darkness and confusion, revealed many strange and bizarre ramifications, many dark recesses of man's

unexplored nature, and the uncanny subtlety of a human mind sharpened by desperate and tragic despair. And it also revealed a hidden page of passional melodrama which, in its essence and organisms, was no less romantic and fascinating than that vivid, theatrical section of the *Comédie Humaine* which deals with the fabulous love of Baron Nucingen for Esther van Gobseck, and with the unhappy Torpille's tragic death.

Margaret Odell was a product of the bohemian *demi-monde* of Broadway—a scintillant figure who seemed somehow to typify the gaudy and spurious romance of transient gaiety. For nearly two years before her death she had been the most conspicuous and, in a sense, popular figure of the city's night life. In our grandparents' day she might have had conferred upon her that somewhat questionable designation, "the toast of the town"; but to-day there are too many aspirants for this classification, too many cliques and violent schisms in the Lepidoptera of our café life, to permit of any one competitor being thus singled out. But, for all the darlings of both professional and lay press-agents, Margaret Odell was a character of unquestioned fame in her little world.

Her notoriety was due in part to certain legendary tales of her affairs with one or two obscure potentates in the backwashes of Europe. She had spent two years abroad after her first success in "The Bretonne Maid"—a popular musical comedy in which she had been mysteriously raised from obscurity to the rank of "star"—and, one may cynically imagine, her press-agent took full advantage

of her absence to circulate vermilion tales of her conquests.

Her appearance went far toward sustaining her somewhat equivocal fame. There was no question that she was beautiful in a hard, slightly flamboyant way. I remember seeing her dancing one night at the Antlers Club—a famous rendezvous for post-midnight pleasure-seekers, run by the notorious Red Raegan.* She impressed me then as a girl of uncommon loveliness, despite the calculating, predatory cast of her features. She was of medium height, slender, graceful in a leonine way, and, I thought, a trifle aloof and even haughty in manner—a result, perhaps, of her reputed association with European royalty. She had the traditional courtesan's full, red lips, and the wide, mongoose eyes of Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel." There was in her face that strange combination of sensual promise and spiritual renunciation with which the painters of all ages have sought to endow their conceptions of the Eternal Magdalene. Hers was the type of face, voluptuous and with a hint of mystery, which rules man's emotions and, by subjugating his mind, drives him to desperate deeds.

Margaret Odell had received the sobriquet of Canary as a result of a part she had played in an elaborate ornithological ballet of the "Follies," in which each girl had been gowned to represent a variety of bird. To her had fallen the rôle of canary; and her costume of white-and-yellow satin, together with her mass of shining golden hair and pink-and-

* The Antlers Club has since been closed by the police; and Red Raegan is now serving a long term in Sing Sing for grand larceny.

white complexion, had distinguished her in the eyes of the spectators as a creature of outstanding charm. Before a fortnight had passed—so eulogistic were her press notices, and so unerringly did the audience single her out for applause—the "Bird Ballet" was changed to the "Canary Ballet," and Miss Odell was promoted to the rank of what might charitably be called *première danseuse*, at the same time having a solo waltz and a song* interpolated for the special display of her charms and talents.

She had quitted the "Follies" at the close of the season, and during her subsequent spectacular career in the haunts of Broadway's night life she had been popularly and familiarly called the Canary. Thus it happened that when her dead body was found, brutally strangled, in her apartment, the crime immediately became known, and was always thereafter referred to, as the Canary murder.

My own participation in the investigation of the Canary murder case—or rather my rôle of Boswellian spectator—constituted one of the most memorable experiences of my life. At the time of Margaret Odell's murder John F.-X. Markham was District Attorney of New York, having taken office the preceding January. I need hardly remind you that during the four years of his incumbency he distinguished himself by his almost uncanny success as a criminal investigator. The praise which was constantly accorded him, however, was highly distasteful to him; for, being a man with a keen sense of honor, he instinctively shrank from accepting credit for achievements not wholly his own. The truth is

* Written especially for her by B. G. De Sylva.

that Markham played only a subsidiary part in the majority of his most famous criminal cases. The credit for their actual solution belonged to one of Markham's very close friends, who refused, at the time, to permit the facts to be made public.

This man was a young social aristocrat, whom, for purposes of anonymity, I have chosen to call Philo Vance.

Vance had many amazing gifts and capabilities. He was an art collector in a small way, a fine amateur pianist, and a profound student of æsthetics and psychology. Although an American, he had largely been educated in Europe, and still retained a slight English accent and intonation. He had a liberal independent income, and spent considerable time fulfilling the social obligations which devolved on him as a result of family connections; but he was neither an idler nor a dilettante. His manner was cynical and aloof; and those who met him only casually, set him down as a snob. But knowing Vance, as I did, intimately, I was able to glimpse the real man beneath the surface indications; and I knew that his cynicism and aloofness, far from being a pose, sprang instinctively from a nature which was at once sensitive and solitary.

Vance was not yet thirty-five, and, in a cold, sculptural fashion, was impressively good-looking. His face was slender and mobile; but there was a stern, sardonic expression to his features, which acted as a barrier between him and his fellows. He was not emotionless, but his emotions were, in the main, intellectual. He was often criticised for his asceticism, yet I have seen him exhibit rare bursts of en-

thusiasm over an æsthetic or psychological problem. However, he gave the impression of remaining remote from all mundane matters; and, in truth, he looked upon life like a dispassionate and impersonal spectator at a play, secretly amused and debonairly cynical at the meaningless futility of it all. Withal, he had a mind avid for knowledge, and few details of the human comedy that came within his sphere of vision escaped him.

It was as a direct result of this intellectual inquisitiveness that he became actively, though unofficially, interested in Markham's criminal investigations.

I kept a fairly complete record of the cases in which Vance participated as a kind of *amicus curiæ*, little thinking that I would ever be privileged to make them public; but Markham, after being defeated, as you remember, on a hopelessly split ticket at the next election, withdrew from politics; and last year Vance went abroad to live, declaring he would never return to America. As a result, I obtained permission from both of them to publish my notes in full. Vance stipulated only that I should not reveal his name; but otherwise no restrictions were placed upon me.

I have related elsewhere* the peculiar circumstances which led to Vance's participation in criminal research, and how, in the face of almost insuperable contradictory evidence, he solved the mysterious shooting of Alvin Benson. The present chronicle deals with his solution of Margaret Odell's murder, which took place in the early fall of the

* "The Benson Murder Case" (Scribner's, 1926).

same year, and which, you will recall, created an even greater sensation than its predecessor.*

A curious set of circumstances was accountable for the way in which Vance was shouldered with this new investigation. Markham for weeks had been badgered by the anti-administration newspapers for the signal failures of his office in obtaining convictions against certain underworld offenders whom the police had turned over to him for prosecution. As a result of prohibition a new and dangerous, and wholly undesirable, kind of night life had sprung up in New York. A large number of well-financed cabarets, calling themselves night clubs, had made their appearance along Broadway and in its side streets; and already there had been an appalling number of serious crimes, both passional and monetary, which, it was said, had had their inception in these unsavory resorts.

At last, when a case of murder accompanying a hold-up and jewel robbery in one of the family hotels up-town was traced directly to plans and preparations made in one of the night clubs, and when two detectives of the Homicide Bureau investigating the case were found dead one morning in the neighborhood of the club, with bullet wounds in their backs, Markham decided to pigeonhole the other affairs of

* The Loeb-Leopold crime, the Dorothy King case, and the Hall-Mills murder came later; but the Canary murder proved fully as conspicuous a case as the Nan Patterson-"Cæsar" Young affair, Durant's murder of Blanche Lamont and Minnie Williams in San Francisco, the Molineux arsenic-poisoning case, and the Carlyle Harris morphine murder. To find a parallel in point of public interest one must recall the Borden double-murder in Fall River, the Thaw case, the shooting of Elwell, and the Rosenthal murder.

his office and take a hand personally in the intolerable criminal conditions that had arisen.*

* The case referred to here was that of Mrs. Elinor Quiggly, a wealthy widow living at the Adlon Hotel in West 96th Street. She was found on the morning of September 5 suffocated by a gag which had been placed on her by robbers who had evidently followed her home from the Club Turque—a small but luxurious all-night café at 89 West 48th Street. The killing of the two detectives, McQuade and Cannison, was, the police believe, due to the fact that they were in possession of incriminating evidence against the perpetrators of the crime. Jewellery amounting to over $50,000 was stolen from the Quiggly apartment.

CHAPTER II

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

(Sunday, September 9)

On the day following his decision, Markham and Vance and I were sitting in a secluded corner of the lounge-room of the Stuyvesant Club. We often came together there, for we were all members of the club, and Markham frequently used it as a kind of unofficial up-town headquarters.*

"It's bad enough to have half the people in this city under the impression that the District Attorney's office is a kind of high-class collection agency," he remarked that night, "without being necessitated to turn detective because I'm not given sufficient evidence, or the right kind of evidence, with which to secure convictions."

Vance looked up with a slow smile, and regarded him quizzically.

"The difficulty would seem to be," he returned, with an indolent drawl, "that the police, being unversed in the exquisite abracadabra of legal procedure, labor under the notion that evidence which would convince a man of ordin'ry intelligence, would also convince a court of law. A silly notion, don't y' know. Lawyers don't really want evidence: they

* The Stuyvesant was a large club, somewhat in the nature of a glorified hotel; and its extensive membership was drawn largely from the political, legal, and financial ranks.

want erudite technicalities. And the average policeman's brain is too forthright to cope with the pedantic demands of jurisprudence."

"It's not as bad as that," Markham retorted, with an attempt at good nature, although the strain of the past few weeks had tended to upset his habitual equanimity. "If there weren't rules of evidence, grave injustice would too often be done innocent persons. And even a criminal is entitled to protection in our courts."

Vance yawned mildly.

"Markham, you should have been a pedagogue. It's positively amazin' how you've mastered all the standard oratorical replies to criticism. And yet, I'm unconvinced. You remember the Wisconsin case of the kidnapped man whom the courts declared presumably dead. Even when he reappeared, hale and hearty, among his former neighbors, his status of being presumably dead was not legally altered. The visible and demonstrable fact that he was actually alive was regarded by the court as an immaterial and impertinent side-issue.* . . . Then there's the touchin' situation—so prevalent in this fair country—of a man being insane in one State and sane in another. . . . Really, y' know, you can't expect a mere lay intelligence, unskilled in the benign processes of legal logic, to perceive such subtle *nuances*. Your layman, swaddled in the darkness of ordin'ry common sense, would say that a person who is a lunatic on one bank of a river would still be a lunatic if he was on the opposite bank. And he'd also

* The case to which Vance referred, I ascertained later, was Shatterham *v.* Shatterham, 417 Mich., 79—a testamentary case.

hold—erroneously, no doubt—that if a man was living, he would presumably be alive."

"Why this academic dissertation?" asked Markham, this time a bit irritably.

"It seems to touch rather vitally on the source of your present predicament," Vance explained equably. "The police, not being lawyers, have apparently got you into hot water, what? . . . Why not start an agitation to send all detectives to law school?"

"You're a great help," retorted Markham.

Vance raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Why disparage my suggestion? Surely you must perceive that it has merit. A man without legal training, when he knows a thing to be true, ignores all incompetent testimony to the contr'ry, and clings to the facts. A court of law listens solemnly to a mass of worthless testimony, and renders a decision not on the facts but according to a complicated set of rules. The result, d' ye see, is that a court often acquits a prisoner, realizing full well that he is guilty. Many a judge has said, in effect, to a culprit: 'I know, and the jury knows, that you committed the crime, but in view of the legally admissible evidence, I declare you innocent. Go and sin again.'"

Markham grunted. "I'd hardly endear myself to the people of this county if I answered the current strictures against me by recommending law courses for the Police Department."

"Permit me, then, to suggest the alternative of Shakespeare's butcher: 'Let's kill all the lawyers.'"

"Unfortunately, it's a situation, not a utopian theory, that has to be met."

"And just how," asked Vance lazily, "do you propose to reconcile the sensible conclusions of the police with what you touchingly call correctness of legal procedure?"

"To begin with," Markham informed him, "I've decided henceforth to do my own investigating of all important night-club criminal cases. I called a conference of the heads of my departments yesterday, and from now on there's going to be some real activity radiating direct from my office. I intend to produce the kind of evidence I need for convictions."

Vance slowly took a cigarette from his case and tapped it on the arm of his chair.

"Ah! So you are going to substitute the conviction of the innocent for the acquittal of the guilty?"

Markham was nettled; turning in his chair he frowned at Vance.

"I won't pretend not to understand your remark," he said acidulously. "You're back again on your favorite theme of the inadequacy of circumstantial evidence as compared with your psychological theories and æsthetic hypotheses."

"Quite so," agreed Vance carelessly. "Y' know, Markham, your sweet and charmin' faith in circumstantial evidence is positively disarming. Before it, the ordin'ry powers of ratiocination are benumbed. I tremble for the innocent victims you are about to gather into your legal net. You'll eventually make the mere attendance at any cabaret a frightful hazard."

Markham smoked a while in silence. Despite the seeming bitterness at times in the discussions of these two men, there was at bottom no animosity

in their attitude toward each other. Their friendship was of long standing, and, despite the dissimilarity of their temperaments and the marked difference in their points of view, a profound mutual respect formed the basis of their intimate relationship.

At length Markham spoke.

"Why this sweeping deprecation of circumstantial evidence? I admit that at times it may be misleading; but it often forms powerful presumptive proof of guilt. Indeed, Vance, one of our greatest legal authorities has demonstrated that it is the most powerful actual evidence in existence. Direct evidence, in the very nature of crime, is almost always unavailable. If the courts had to depend on it, the great majority of criminals would still be at large."

"I was under the impression that this precious majority had always enjoyed its untrammelled freedom."

Markham ignored the interruption.

"Take this example: A dozen adults see an animal running across the snow, and testify that it was a chicken; whereas a child sees the same animal, and declares it was a duck. They thereupon examine the animal's footprints and find them to be the web-footed tracks made by a duck. Is it not conclusive, then, that the animal was a duck and not a chicken, despite the preponderance of direct evidence?"

"I'll grant you your duck," acceded Vance indifferently.

"And having gratefully accepted the gift," pursued Markham, "I propound a corollary: A dozen adults see a human figure crossing the snow, and

take oath it was a woman; whereas a child asserts that the figure was a man. Now, will you not also grant that the circumstantial evidence of a man's footprints in the snow would supply incontrovertible proof that it was, in fact, a man, and not a woman?"

"Not at all, my dear Justinian," replied Vance, stretching his legs languidly in front of him; "unless, of course, you could show that a human being possesses no higher order of brains than a duck."

"What have brains to do with it?" Markham asked impatiently. "Brains don't affect one's footprints."

"Not those of a duck, certainly. But brains might very well—and, no doubt, often do—affect the footprints of a human being."

"Am I having a lesson in anthropology, Darwinian adaptability, or merely metaphysical speculation?"

"In none of those abstruse subjects," Vance assured him. "I'm merely stating a simple fact culled from observation."

"Well, according to your highly and peculiarly developed processes of reasoning, would the circumstantial evidence of those masculine footprints indicate a man or a woman?"

"Not necessarily either," Vance answered; "or, rather, a possibility of each. Such evidence, when applied to a human being—to a creature, that is, with a reasoning mind—would merely mean to me that the figure crossing the snow was either a man in his own shoes, or a woman in man's shoes; or perhaps, even, a long-legged child. In short, it would

convey to my purely unlegal intelligence only that the tracks were made by some descendant of the *Pithecanthropus erectus* wearing men's shoes on his nether limbs—sex and age unknown. A duck's spoors, on the other hand, I might be tempted to take at their face value."

"I'm delighted to observe," said Markham, "that, at least, you repudiate the possibility of a duck dressing itself up in the gardener's boots."

Vance was silent for a moment; then he said:

"The trouble with you modern Solons, d' ye see, is that you attempt to reduce human nature to a formula; whereas the truth is that man, like life, is infinitely complex. He's shrewd and tricky—skilled for centuries in all the most diabolical chicaneries. He is a creature of low cunning, who, even in the normal course of his vain and idiotic struggle for existence, instinctively and deliberately tells ninety-nine lies to one truth. A duck, not having had the heaven-kissing advantages of human civilization, is a straightforward and eminently honest bird."

"How," asked Markham, "since you jettison all the ordinary means of arriving at a conclusion, would you decide the sex or species of this person who left the masculine footprints in the snow?"

Vance blew a spiral of smoke toward the ceiling.

"First, I'd repudiate all the evidence of the twelve astigmatic adults and the one bright-eyed child. Next, I'd ignore the footprints in the snow. Then, with a mind unprejudiced by dubious testimony and uncluttered with material clues, I'd determine the exact nature of the crime which this fleeing person had committed. After having analyzed its vari-

ous factors, I could infallibly tell you not only whether the culprit was a man or a woman, but I could describe his habits, character, and personality. And I could do all this whether the fleeing figure left male or female or kangaroo tracks, or used stilts, or rode off on a velocipede, or levitated without leaving tracks at all."

Markham smiled broadly. "You'd be worse than the police in the matter of supplying me legal evidence, I fear."

"I, at least, wouldn't procure evidence against some unsuspecting person whose boots had been appropriated by the real culprit," retorted Vance. "And, y' know, Markham, as long as you pin your faith to footprints you'll inevitably arrest just those persons whom the actual criminals want you to—namely, persons who have had nothing to do with the criminal conditions you're about to investigate."

He became suddenly serious.

"See here, old man; there are some shrewd intelligences at present allied with what the theologians call the powers of darkness. The surface appearances of many of these crimes that are worrying you are palpably deceptive. Personally, I don't put much stock in the theory that a malevolent gang of cutthroats have organized an American camorra, and made the silly night clubs their headquarters. The idea is too melodramatic. It smacks too much of the gaudy journalistic imagination: it's too Eugène Sue-ish. Crime isn't a mass instinct except during war-time, and then it's merely an obscene sport. Crime, d' ye see, is a personal and individual business. One doesn't make up a *partie carrée* for a mur-

der as one does for a bridge game. . . . Markham, old dear, don't let this romantic criminological idea lead you astray. And don't scrutinize the figurative footprints in the snow too closely. They'll confuse you most horribly—you're far too trustin' and literal for this wicked world. I warn you that no clever criminal is going to leave his own footprints for your tape-measure and calipers."

He sighed deeply, and gave Markham a look of bantering commiseration.

"And have you paused to consider that your first case may even be devoid of footprints? . . . Alas! What, then, will you do?"

"I could overcome that difficulty by taking you along with me," suggested Markham, with a touch of irony. "How would you like to accompany me on the next important case that breaks?"

"I am ravished by the idea," said Vance.

Two days later the front pages of our metropolitan press carried glaring headlines telling of the murder of Margaret Odell.

CHAPTER III

THE MURDER

(Tuesday, September 11; 8.30 a. m.)

It was barely half past eight on that momentous morning of September the 11th when Markham brought word to us of the event.

I was living temporarily with Vance at his home in East 38th Street—a large remodelled apartment occupying the two top floors of a beautiful mansion. For several years I had been Vance's personal legal representative and adviser, having resigned from my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis and Van Dine to devote myself to his needs and interests. His affairs were by no means voluminous, but his personal finances, together with his numerous purchases of paintings and *objets d'art*, occupied my full time without burdening me. This monetary and legal stewardship was eminently congenial to my tastes; and my friendship with Vance, which had dated from our undergraduate days at Harvard, supplied the social and human element in an arrangement which otherwise might easily have degenerated into one of mere drab routine.

On this particular morning I had risen early and was working in the library when Currie, Vance's valet and majordomo, announced Markham's presence in the living-room. I was considerably astonished at this early-morning visit, for Markham well knew that Vance, who rarely rose before noon, re-

sented any intrusion upon his matutinal slumbers. And in that moment I received the curious impression that something unusual and portentous was toward.

I found Markham pacing restlessly up and down, his hat and gloves thrown carelessly on the centre-table. As I entered he halted and looked at me with harassed eyes. He was a moderately tall man, clean-shaven, gray-haired, and firmly set up. His appearance was distinguished, and his manner courteous and kindly. But beneath his gracious exterior there was an aggressive sternness, an indomitable, grim strength, that gave one the sense of dogged efficiency and untiring capability.

"Good morning, Van," he greeted me, with impatient perfunctoriness. "There's been another half-world murder—the worst and ugliest thus far. . . ." He hesitated, and regarded me searchingly. "You recall my chat with Vance at the club the other night? There was something damned prophetic in his remarks. And you remember I half promised to take him along on the next important case. Well, the case has broken—with a vengeance. Margaret Odell, whom they called the Canary, has been strangled in her apartment; and from what I just got over the phone, it looks like another night-club affair. I'm headed for the Odell apartment now. . . . What about rousing out the sybarite?"

"By all means," I agreed, with an alacrity which, I fear, was in large measure prompted by purely selfish motives. The Canary! If one had sought the city over for a victim whose murder would stir up excitement, there could have been but few selections better calculated to produce this result.

Hastening to the door, I summoned Currie, and told him to call Vance at once.

"I'm afraid, sir——" began Currie, politely hesitant.

"Calm your fears," cut in Markham. "I'll take all responsibility for waking him at this indecent hour."

Currie sensed an emergency and departed.

A minute or two later Vance, in an elaborately embroidered silk kimono and sandals, appeared at the living-room door.

"My word!" he greeted us, in mild astonishment, glancing at the clock. "Haven't you chaps gone to bed yet?"

He strolled to the mantel, and selected a gold-tipped *Régie* cigarette from a small Florentine humidor.

Markham's eyes narrowed: he was in no mood for levity.

"The Canary has been murdered," I blurted out.

Vance held his wax vesta poised, and gave me a look of indolent inquisitiveness. "Whose canary?"

"Margaret Odell was found strangled this morning," amended Markham brusquely. "Even *you*, wrapped in your scented cotton-wool, have heard of her. And you can realize the significance of the crime. I'm personally going to look for those footprints in the snow; and if you want to come along, as you intimated the other night, you'll have to get a move on."

Vance crushed out his cigarette.

"Margaret Odell, eh?—Broadway's blonde Aspasia—or was it Phryne who had the *coiffure d'or?*

. . . Most distressin'!" Despite his offhand manner, I could see he was deeply interested. "The base enemies of law and order are determined to chivvy you most horribly, aren't they, old dear? Deuced inconsiderate of 'em! . . . Excuse me while I seek habiliments suitable to the occasion."

He disappeared into his bedroom, while Markham took out a large cigar and resolutely prepared it for smoking, and I returned to the library to put away the papers on which I had been working.

In less than ten minutes Vance reappeared, dressed for the street.

"*Bien, mon vieux,*" he announced gaily, as Currie handed him his hat and gloves and a malacca cane. "*Allons-y!*"

We rode up-town along Madison Avenue, turned into Central Park, and came out by the West 72d Street entrance. Margaret Odell's apartment was at 184 West 71st Street, near Broadway; and as we drew up to the curb, it was necessary for the patrolman on duty to make a passage for us through the crowd that had already gathered as a result of the arrival of the police.

Feathergill, an assistant District Attorney, was waiting in the main hall for his Chief's arrival.

"It's too bad, sir," he lamented. "A rotten show all round. And just at this time! . . ." He shrugged his shoulders discouragingly.

"It may collapse quickly," said Markham, shaking the other's hand. "How are things going? Sergeant Heath phoned me right after you called, and said that, at first glance, the case looked a bit stubborn."

"Stubborn?" repeated Feathergill lugubriously. "It's downright impervious. Heath is spinning round like a turbine. He was called off the Boyle case, by the way, to devote his talents to this new shocker Inspector Moran arrived ten minutes ago, and gave him the official imprimatur."

"Well, Heath's a good man," declared Markham. "We'll work it out. . . . Which is the apartment?"

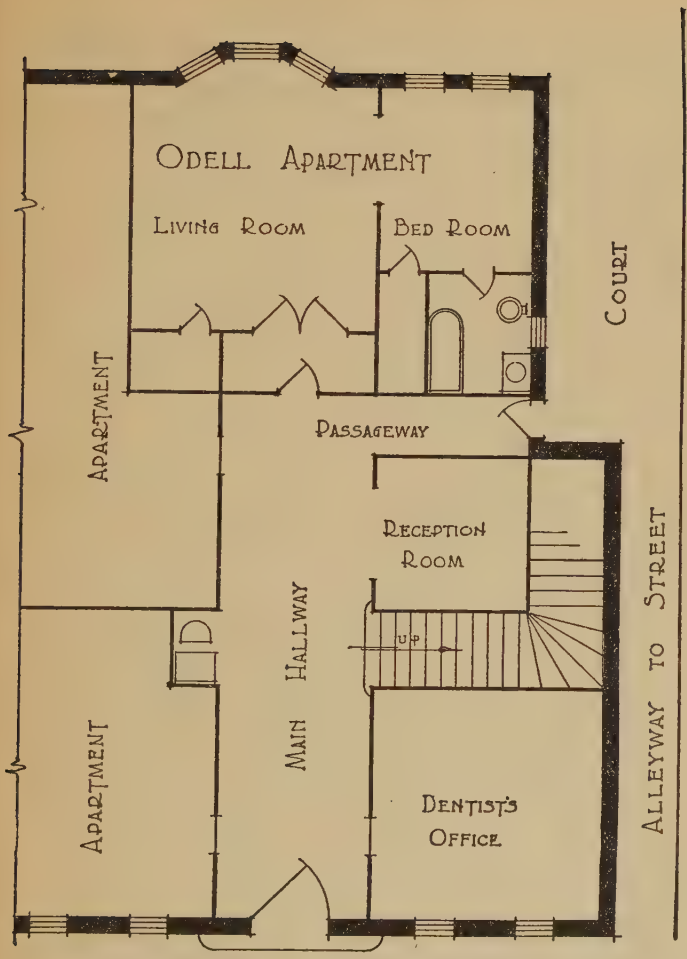
Feathergill led the way to a door at the rear of the main hall.

"Here you are, sir," he announced. "I'll be running along now. I need sleep. Good luck!" And he was gone.

It will be necessary to give a brief description of the house and its interior arrangement, for the somewhat peculiar structure of the building played a vital part in the seemingly insoluble problem posed by the murder.

The house, which was a four-story stone structure originally built as a residence, had been remodelled, both inside and outside, to meet the requirements of an exclusive individual apartment dwelling. There were, I believe, three or four separate suites on each floor; but the quarters up-stairs need not concern us. The main floor was the scene of the crime, and here there were three apartments and a dentist's office.

The main entrance to the building was directly on the street, and extending straight back from the front door was a wide hallway. Directly at the rear of this hallway, and facing the entrance, was the door to the Odell apartment, which bore the numeral "3." About half-way down the front hall,


ODELL APARTMENT
LIVING ROOM
BED ROOM
COURT
APARTMENT
PASSAGEWAY
RECEPTION ROOM
MAIN HALLWAY
UP
ALLEYWAY TO STREET
APARTMENT
DENTIST'S OFFICE
WEST SEVENTY-FIRST STREET

on the right-hand side, was the stairway leading to the floors above; and directly beyond the stairway, also on the right, was a small reception-room with a wide archway instead of a door. Directly opposite to the stairway, in a small recess, stood the telephone switchboard. There was no elevator in the house.

Another important feature of this ground-floor plan was a small passageway at the rear of the main hall and at right angles to it, which led past the front walls of the Odell apartment to a door opening on a court at the west side of the building. This court was connected with the street by an alley four feet wide.

In the accompanying diagram this arrangement of the ground floor can be easily visualized, and I suggest that the reader fix it in his mind; for I doubt if ever before so simple and obvious an architectural design played such an important part in a criminal mystery. By its very simplicity and almost conventional familiarity—indeed, by its total lack of any puzzling complications—it proved so baffling to the investigators that the case threatened, for many days, to remain forever insoluble.

As Markham entered the Odell apartment that morning Sergeant Ernest Heath came forward at once and extended his hand. A look of relief passed over his broad, pugnacious features; and it was obvious that the animosity and rivalry which always exist between the Detective Division and the District Attorney's office during the investigation of any criminal case had no place in his attitude on this occasion.

"I'm glad you've come, sir," he said; and meant it.

He then turned to Vance with a cordial smile, and held out his hand.*

"So the amachoor sleuth is with us again!" His tone held a friendly banter.

"Oh, quite," murmured Vance. "How's your induction coil working this beautiful September morning, Sergeant?"

"I'd hate to tell you!" Then Heath's face grew suddenly grave, and he turned to Markham. "It's a raw deal, sir. Why in hell couldn't they have picked some one besides the Canary for their dirty work? There's plenty of Janes on Broadway who coulda faded from the picture without causing a second alarm; but they gotta go and bump off the Queen of Sheba!"

As he spoke, William M. Moran, the commanding officer of the Detective Bureau, came into the little foyer and performed the usual hand-shaking ceremony. Though he had met Vance and me but once before, and then casually, he remembered us both and addressed us courteously by name.

"Your arrival," he said to Markham, in a well-bred, modulated voice, "is very welcome. Sergeant Heath will give you what preliminary information you want. I'm still pretty much in the dark myself —only just arrived."

"A lot of information *I've* got to give," grumbled Heath, as he led the way into the living-room.

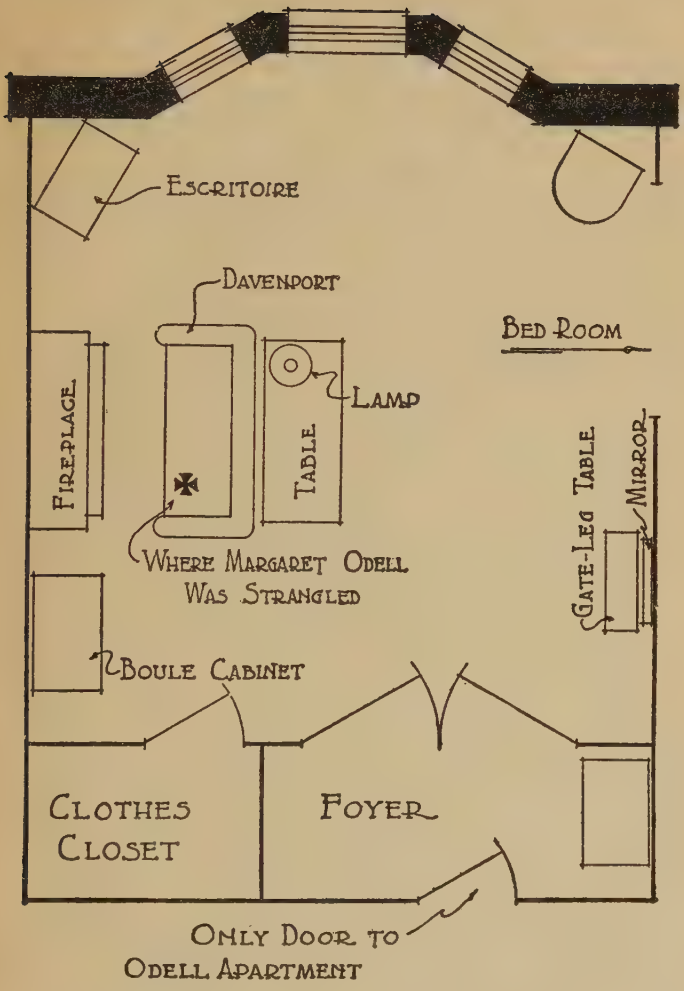
Margaret Odell's apartment was a suite of two fairly large rooms connected by a wide archway draped with heavy damask portières. The entrance

* Heath had become acquainted with Vance during the investigation of the Benson murder case two months previously.

door from the main hall of the building led into a small rectangular foyer about eight feet long and four feet deep, with double Venetian-glass doors opening into the main room beyond. There was no other entrance to the apartment, and the bedroom could be reached only through the archway from the living-room.

There was a large davenport, covered with brocaded silk, in front of the fireplace in the left-hand wall of the living-room, with a long narrow library-table of inlaid rosewood extending along its back. On the opposite wall, between the foyer and the archway into the bedroom, hung a triplicate Marie Antoinette mirror, beneath which stood a mahogany gate-legged table. On the far side of the archway, near the large oriel window, was a baby grand Steinway piano with a beautifully designed and decorated case of Louis-Seize ornamentation. In the corner to the right of the fireplace was a spindle-legged escritoire and a square hand-painted waste-paper basket of vellum. To the left of the fireplace stood one of the loveliest Boule cabinets I have ever seen. Several excellent reproductions of Boucher, Fragonard, and Watteau hung about the walls. The bedroom contained a chest of drawers, a dressing-table, and several gold-leaf chairs. The whole apartment seemed eminently in keeping with the Canary's fragile and evanescent personality.

As we stepped from the little foyer into the living-room and stood for a moment looking about, a scene bordering on wreckage met our eyes. The rooms had apparently been ransacked by some one in a frenzy of haste, and the disorder of the place was appalling.


ESCRITOIRE
DAVENPORT
BED ROOM
FIREPLACE
LAMP
TABLE
GATE-LEG TABLE
MIRROR
WHERE MARGARET ODELL
WAS STRANGLED
BOULE CABINET
CLOTHES
CLOSET
FOYER
ONLY DOOR TO
ODELL APARTMENT

"They didn't exactly do the job in dainty fashion," remarked Inspector Moran.

"I suppose we oughta be grateful they didn't blow the joint up with dynamite," returned Heath acridly.

But it was not the general disorder that most attracted us. Our gaze was almost immediately drawn and held by the body of the dead girl, which rested in an unnatural, semi-recumbent attitude in the corner of the davenport nearest to where we stood. Her head was turned backward, as if by force, over the silken tufted upholstery; and her hair had come unfastened and lay beneath her head and over her bare shoulder like a frozen cataract of liquid gold. Her face, in violent death, was distorted and unlovely. Her skin was discolored; her eyes were staring; her mouth was open, and her lips were drawn back. Her neck, on either side of the thyroid cartilage, showed ugly dark bruises. She was dressed in a flimsy evening gown of black Chantilly lace over cream-colored chiffon, and across the arm of the davenport had been thrown an evening cape of cloth-of-gold trimmed with ermine.

There were evidences of her ineffectual struggle with the person who had strangled her. Besides the dishevelled condition of her hair, one of the shoulder-straps of her gown had been severed, and there was a long rent in the fine lace across her breast. A small corsage of artificial orchids had been torn from her bodice, and lay crumpled in her lap. One satin slipper had fallen off, and her right knee was twisted inward on the seat of the davenport, as if she had sought to lift herself out of the suffocating clutches of her antagonist. Her fingers were still flexed, no

doubt as they had been at the moment of her capitulation to death, when she had relinquished her grip upon the murderer's wrists.

The spell of horror cast over us by the sight of the tortured body was broken by the matter-of-fact tones of Heath.

"You see, Mr. Markham, she was evidently sitting in the corner of this settee when she was grabbed suddenly from behind."

Markham nodded. "It must have taken a pretty strong man to strangle her so easily."

"I'll say!" agreed Heath. He bent over and pointed to the girl's fingers, on which showed several abrasions. "They stripped her rings off, too; and they didn't go about it gentle, either." Then he indicated a segment of fine platinum chain, set with tiny pearls, which hung over one of her shoulders. "And they grabbed whatever it was hanging round her neck, and broke the chain doing it. They weren't overlooking anything, or losing any time. . . . A swell, gentlemanly job. Nice and refined."

"Where's the Medical Examiner?" asked Markham.

"He's coming," Heath told him. "You can't get Doc Doremus to go anywheres without his breakfast."

"He may find something else—something that doesn't show."

"There's plenty showing for me," declared Heath. "Look at this apartment. It wouldn't be much worse if a Kansas cyclone had struck it."

We turned from the depressing spectacle of the dead girl and moved toward the centre of the room.

"Be careful not to touch anything, Mr. Markham," warned Heath. "I've sent for the finger-print experts—they'll be here any minute now."

Vance looked up in mock astonishment.

"Finger-prints? You don't say—really! How delightful!—Imagine a johnnie in this enlightened day leaving his finger-prints for you to find."

"All crooks aren't clever, Mr. Vance," declared Heath combatively.

"Oh, dear, no! They'd never be apprehended if they were. But, after all, Sergeant, even an authentic finger-print merely means that the person who made it was dallying around at some time or other. It doesn't indicate guilt."

"Maybe so," conceded Heath doggedly. "But I'm here to tell you that if I get any good honest-to-God finger-prints outa this devastated area, it's not going so easy with the bird that made 'em."

Vance appeared to be shocked. "You positively terrify me, Sergeant. Henceforth I shall adopt mittens as a permanent addition to my attire. I'm always handling the furniture and the teacups and the various knickknacks in the houses where I call, don't y' know."

Markham interposed himself at this point, and suggested they make a tour of inspection while waiting for the Medical Examiner.

"They didn't add anything much to the usual methods," Heath pointed out. "Killed the girl, and then ripped things wide open."

The two rooms had apparently been thoroughly ransacked. Clothes and various articles were strewn about the floor. The doors of both clothes-closets

(there was one in each room) were open, and to judge from the chaos in the bedroom closet, it had been hurriedly searched; although the closet off of the living-room, which was given over to the storage of infrequently used items, appeared to have been ignored. The drawers of the dressing-table and chest had been partly emptied on to the floor, and the bedclothes had been snatched away and the mattress turned back. Two chairs and a small occasional table were upset; several vases were broken, as if they had been searched and then thrown down in the wrath of disappointment; and the Marie Antoinette mirror had been broken. The escritoire was open, and its pigeonholes had been emptied in a jumbled pile upon the blotter. The doors of the Boule cabinet swung wide, and inside there was the same confusion of contents that marked the interior of the escritoire. The bronze-and-porcelain lamp on the end of the library-table was lying on its side, its satin shade torn where it had struck the sharp corner of a silver *bonbonnière.*

Two objects in the general disarray particularly attracted my attention—a black metal document-box of the kind purchasable at any stationery store, and a large jewel-case of sheet steel with a circular inset lock. The latter of these objects was destined to play a curious and sinister part in the investigation to follow.

The document-box, which was now empty, had been placed on the library-table, next to the overturned lamp. Its lid was thrown back, and the key was still in the lock. In all the litter and disorganization of the room, this box seemed to be the one out-

standing indication of calm and orderly activity on the part of the wrecker.

The jewel-case, on the other hand, had been violently wrenched open. It sat on the dressing-table in the bedroom, dinted and twisted out of shape by the terrific leverage that had been necessary to force it, and beside it lay a brass-handled, cast-iron poker which had evidently been brought from the living-room and used as a makeshift chisel with which to prize open the lock.

Vance had glanced but casually at the different objects in the rooms as we made our rounds, but when he came to the dressing-table, he paused abruptly. Taking out his monocle, he adjusted it carefully, and leaned over the broken jewel-case.

"Most extr'ordin'ry!" he murmured, tapping the edge of the lid with his gold pencil. "What do you make of that, Sergeant?"

Heath had been eyeing Vance with narrowed lids as the latter bent over the dressing-table.

"What's in your mind, Mr. Vance?" he, in turn, asked.

"Oh, more than you could ever guess," Vance answered lightly. "But just at the moment I was toying with the idea that this steel case was never torn open by that wholly inadequate iron poker, what?"

Heath nodded his head approvingly. "So you, too, noticed that, did you? . . . And you're dead right. That poker might've twisted the box a little, but it never snapped that lock."

He turned to Inspector Moran.

"That's the puzzler I've sent for 'Prof' Brenner to clean up—*if* he can. The jimmying of that jewel-

case looks to me like a high-class professional job. No Sunday-school superintendent did it."

Vance continued for a while to study the box, but at length he turned away with a perplexed frown.

"I say!" he commented. "Something devilish queer took place here last night."

"Oh, not so queer," Heath amended. "It was a thorough job, all right, but there's nothing mysterious about it."

Vance polished his monocle and put it away.

"If you go to work on that basis, Sergeant," he returned carelessly, "I greatly fear you'll run aground on a reef. And may kind Heaven bring you safe to shore!"

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINT OF A HAND

(Tuesday, September 11; 9.30 a. m.)

A few minutes after we had returned to the living-room Doctor Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner, arrived, jaunty and energetic. Immediately in his train came three other men, one of whom carried a bulky camera and a folded tripod. These were Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, finger-print experts, and Peter Quackenbush, the official photographer.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Doctor Doremus. "Quite a gathering of the clans. More trouble, eh? . . . I wish your friends, Inspector, would choose a more respectable hour for their little differences. This early rising upsets my liver."

He shook hands with everybody in a brisk, businesslike manner.

"Where's the body?" he demanded breezily, looking about the room. He caught sight of the girl on the davenport. "Ah! A lady."

Stepping quickly forward, he made a rapid examination of the dead girl, scrutinizing her neck and fingers, moving her arms and head to determine the condition of *rigor mortis*, and finally unflexing her stiffened limbs and laying her out straight on the long cushions, preparatory to a more detailed necropsy.

The rest of us moved toward the bedroom, and Heath motioned to the finger-print men to follow.

"Go over everything," he told them. "But take a special look at this jewel-case and the handle of this poker, and give that document-box in the other room a close up-and-down."

"Right," assented Captain Dubois. "We'll begin in here while the doc's busy in the other room." And he and Bellamy set to work.

Our interest naturally centred on the Captain's labors. For fully five minutes we watched him inspecting the twisted steel sides of the jewel-case and the smooth, polished handle of the poker. He held the objects gingerly by their edges, and, placing a jeweller's glass in his eye, flashed his pocket-light on every square inch of them. At length he put them down, scowling.

"No finger-prints here," he announced. "Wiped clean."

"I mignta known it," grumbled Heath. "It was a professional job, all right." He turned to the other expert. "Found anything, Bellamy?"

"Nothing to help," was the grumpy reply. "A few old smears with dust over 'em."

"Looks like a washout," Heath commented irritably; "though I'm hoping for something in the other room."

At this moment Doctor Doremus came into the bedroom and, taking a sheet from the bed, returned to the davenport and covered the body of the murdered girl. Then he snapped shut his case, and putting on his hat at a rakish angle, stepped forward with the air of a man in great haste to be on his way.

"Simple case of strangulation from behind," he said, his words running together. "Digital bruises about the front of the throat; thumb bruises in the sub-occipital region. Attack must have been unexpected. A quick, competent job though deceased evidently battled a little."

"How do you suppose her dress became torn, doctor?" asked Vance.

"Oh, that? Can't tell. She may have done it herself—instinctive motions of clutching for air."

"Not likely though, what?"

"Why not? The dress was torn and the bouquet was ripped off, and the fellow who was choking her had both hands on her throat. Who else could've done it?"

Vance shrugged his shoulders, and began lighting a cigarette.

Heath, annoyed by his apparently inconsequential interruption, put the next question.

"Don't those marks on the fingers mean that her rings were stripped off?"

"Possibly. They're fresh abrasions. Also, there's a couple of lacerations on the left wrist and slight contusions on the thenar eminence, indicating that a bracelet may have been forcibly pulled over her hand."

"That fits O. K.," pronounced Heath, with satisfaction. "And it looks like they snatched a pendant of some kind off her neck."

"Probably," indifferently agreed Doctor Doremus. "The piece of chain had cut into her flesh a little behind the right shoulder."

"And the time?"

"Nine or ten hours ago. Say, about eleven-thirty —maybe a little before. Not after midnight, anyway." He had been teetering restlessly on his toes. "Anything else?"

Heath pondered.

"I guess that's all, doc," he decided. "I'll get the body to the mortuary right away. Let's have the post-mortem as soon as you can."

"You'll get a report in the morning." And despite his apparent eagerness to be off, Doctor Doremus stepped into the bedroom, and shook hands with Heath and Markham and Inspector Moran before he hurried out.

Heath followed him to the door, and I heard him direct the officer outside to telephone the Department of Public Welfare to send an ambulance at once for the girl's body.

"I positively adore that official archiater of yours," Vance said to Markham. "Such detachment! Here are you stewing most distressingly over the passing of one damsel fair and frail, and that blithe *medicus* is worrying only over a sluggish liver brought on by early rising."

"What has he to be upset over?" complained Markham. "The newspapers are not riding him with spurs. . . . And by the way, what was the point of your questions about the torn dress?"

Vance lazily inspected the tip of his cigarette.

"Consider," he said. "The lady was evidently taken by surprise; for, had there been a struggle beforehand, she would not have been strangled from behind while sitting down. Therefore, her gown and corsage were undoubtedly intact at the time she

was seized. But—despite the conclusion of your dashing Paracelsus—the damage to her toilet was not of a nature that could have been self-inflicted in her struggle for air. If she had felt the constriction of the gown across her breast, she would have snatched the bodice itself by putting her fingers inside the band. But, if you noticed, her bodice was intact; the only thing that had been torn was the deep lace flounce on the outside; and it had been torn, or rather ripped, by a strong lateral pull; whereas, in the circumstances, any wrench on her part would have been downward or outward."

Inspector Moran was listening intently, but Heath seemed restless and impatient; apparently he regarded the torn gown as irrelevant to the simple main issue.

"Moreover," Vance went on, "there is the corsage. If she herself had torn it off while being strangled, it would doubtless have fallen to the floor; for, remember, she offered considerable resistance. Her body was twisted sidewise; her knee was drawn up, and one slipper had been kicked off. Now, no bunch of silken posies is going to remain in a lady's lap during such a commotion. Even when ladies sit still, their gloves and hand-bags and handkerchiefs and programmes and serviettes are forever sliding off of their laps on to the floor, don't y' know."

"But if your argument's correct," protested Markham, "then the tearing of the lace and the snatching off of the corsage could have been done only after she was dead. And I can't see any object in such senseless vandalism."

"Neither can I," sighed Vance. "It's all devilish queer."

Heath looked up at him sharply. "That's the second time you've said that. But there's nothing what you'd call queer about this mess. It is a straight-away case." He spoke with an overtone of insistence, like a man arguing against his own insecurity of opinion. "The dress might've been torn almost any time," he went on stubbornly. "And the flower might've got caught in the lace of her skirt so it couldn't roll off."

"And how would you explain the jewel-case, Sergeant?" asked Vance.

"Well, the fellow might've tried the poker, and then, finding it wouldn't work, used his jimmy."

"If he had the efficient jimmy," countered Vance, "why did he go to the trouble of bringing the silly poker from the living-room?"

The Sergeant shook his head perplexedly.

"You never can tell why some of these crooks act the way they do."

"Tut, tut!" Vance chided him. "There should be no such word as 'never' in the bright lexicon of detecting."

Heath regarded him sharply. "Was there anything else that struck you as queer?" His subtle doubts were welling up again.

"Well, there's the lamp on the table in the other room."

We were standing near the archway between the two rooms, and Heath turned quickly and looked blankly at the fallen lamp.

"I don't see anything queer about that."

"It has been upset—eh, what?" suggested Vance.

"What if it has?" Heath was frankly puzzled.

"Damn near everything in this apartment has been knocked crooked."

"Ah! But there's a reason for most of the other things having been disturbed—like the drawers and pigeonholes and closets and vases. They all indicate a search; they're consistent with a raid for loot. But that lamp, now, d' ye see, doesn't fit into the picture. It's a false note. It was standing on the opposite end of the table to where the murder was committed, at least five feet away; and it couldn't possibly have been knocked over in the struggle. . . . No, it won't do. It's got no business being upset, any more than that pretty mirror over the gate-legged table has any business being broken. That's why it's queer."

"What about those chairs and the little table?" asked Heath, pointing to two small gilded chairs which had been overturned, and a fragile tip-table that lay on its side near the piano.

"Oh, they fit into the ensemble," returned Vance. "They're all light pieces of furniture which could easily have been knocked over, or thrown aside, by the hasty gentleman who rifled these rooms."

"The lamp might've been knocked over in the same way," argued Heath.

Vance shook his head. "Not tenable, Sergeant. It has a solid bronze base, and isn't at all top-heavy; and being set well back on the table, it wasn't in any one's way. . . . That lamp was upset deliberately."

The Sergeant was silent for a while. Experience had taught him not to underestimate Vance's observations; and, I must confess, as I looked at the lamp lying on its side on the end of the library-table,

well removed from any of the other disordered objects in the room, Vance's argument seemed to possess considerable force. I tried hard to fit it into a hasty reconstruction of the crime, but was utterly unable to do so.

"Anything else that don't seem to fit into the picture?" Heath at length asked.

Vance pointed with his cigarette toward the clothes-closet in the living-room. This closet was alongside of the foyer, in the corner near the Boule cabinet, directly opposite to the end of the davenport.

"You might let your mind dally a moment with the condition of that clothes-press," suggested Vance carelessly. "You will note that, though the door's ajar, the contents have not been touched. And it's about the only area in the apartment that hasn't been disturbed."

Heath walked over and looked into the closet.

"Well, anyway, I'll admit that's queer," he finally conceded.

Vance had followed him indolently, and stood gazing over his shoulder.

"And my word!" he exclaimed suddenly. "The key's on the inside of the lock. Fancy that, now! One can't lock a closet door with the key on the inside—can one, Sergeant?"

"The key may not mean anything," Heath observed hopefully. "Maybe the door was never locked. Anyhow, we'll find out about that pretty soon. I'm holding the maid outside, and I'm going to have her on the carpet as soon as the Captain finishes his job here."

He turned to Dubois, who, having completed his

search for finger-prints in the bedroom, was now inspecting the piano.

"Any luck yet?"

The Captain shook his head.

"Gloves," he answered succinctly.

"Same here," supplemented Bellamy gruffly, on his knees before the escritoire.

Vance, with a sardonic smile, turned and walked to the window, where he stood looking out and smoking placidly, as if his entire interest in the case had evaporated.

At this moment the door from the main hall opened, and a short thin little man, with gray hair and a scraggly gray beard, stepped inside and stood blinking against the vivid sunlight.

"Good morning, Professor," Heath greeted the newcomer. "Glad to see you. I've got something nifty, right in your line."

Deputy-Inspector Conrad Brenner was one of that small army of obscure, but highly capable, experts who are connected with the New York Police Department, and who are constantly being consulted on abstruse technical problems, but whose names and achievements rarely get into the public prints. His specialty was locks and burglars' tools; and I doubt if, even among those exhaustively painstaking criminologists of the University of Lausanne, there was a more accurate reader of the evidential signs left by the implements of house-breakers. In appearance and bearing he was like a withered little college professor.* His black, unpressed suit was

* It is an interesting fact that for the nineteen years he had been connected with the New York Police Department, he had been referred to, by his superiors and subordinates alike, as "the Professor."

old-fashioned in cut; and he wore a very high stiff collar, like a *fin-de-siècle* clergyman, with a narrow black string tie. His gold-rimmed spectacles were so thick-lensed that the pupils of his eyes gave the impression of acute belladonna poisoning.

When Heath had spoken to him, he merely stood staring with a sort of detached expectancy; he seemed utterly unaware that there was any one else in the room. The Sergeant, evidently familiar with the little man's idiosyncrasies of manner, did not wait for a response, but started at once for the bedroom.

"This way, please, Professor," he directed cajolingly, going to the dressing-table and picking up the jewel-case. "Take a squint at this, and tell me what you see."

Inspector Brenner followed Heath, without looking to right or left, and, taking the jewel-case, went silently to the window and began to examine it. Vance, whose interest seemed suddenly to be reawakened, came forward and stood watching him.

For fully five minutes the little expert inspected the case, holding it within a few inches of his myopic eyes. Then he lifted his glance to Heath and winked several times rapidly.

"Two instruments were used in opening this case." His voice was small and high-pitched, but there was in it an undeniable quality of authority. "One bent the lid and made several fractures on the baked enamel. The other was, I should say, a steel chisel of some kind, and was used to break the lock. The first instrument, which was blunt, was employed amateurishly, at the wrong angle of leverage; and the effort resulted only in twisting the over-

hang of the lid. But the steel chisel was inserted with a knowledge of the correct point of oscillation, where a minimum of leverage would produce the counteracting stress necessary to displace the lock-bolts."

"A professional job?" suggested Heath.

"Highly so," answered the Inspector, again blinking. "That is to say, the forcing of the lock was professional. And I would even go so far as to advance the opinion that the instrument used was one especially constructed for such illegal purposes."

"Could this have done the job?" Heath held out the poker.

The other looked at it closely, and turned it over several times.

"It might have been the instrument that bent the cover, but it was not the one used for prying open the lock. This poker is cast iron and would have snapped under any great pressure; whereas this box is of cold rolled eighteen-gauge steel plate, with an inset cylinder pin-tumbler lock taking a paracentric key. The leverage force necessary to distort the flange sufficiently to lift the lid could have been made only by a steel chisel."

"Well, that's that." Heath seemed well satisfied with Inspector Brenner's conclusion. "I'll send the box down to you, Professor, and you can let me know what else you find out."

"I'll take it along, if you have no objection." And the little man tucked it under his arm and shuffled out without another word.

Heath grinned at Markham. "Queer bird. He ain't happy unless he's measuring jimmy marks on

doors and windows and things. He couldn't wait till I sent him the box. He'll hold it lovingly on his lap all the way down in the subway, like a mother with a baby."

Vance was still standing near the dressing-table, gazing perplexedly into space.

"Markham," he said, "the condition of that jewel-case is positively astounding. It's unreasonable, illogical—insane. It complicates the situation most damnably. That steel box simply couldn't have been chiselled open by a professional burglar . . . and yet, don't y' know, it actually was."

Before Markham could reply, a satisfied grunt from Captain Dubois attracted our attention.

"I've got something for you, Sergeant," he announced.

We moved expectantly into the living-room. Dubois was bending over the end of the library-table almost directly behind the place where Margaret Odell's body had been found. He took out an insufflator, which was like a very small hand-bellows, and blew a fine light-yellow powder evenly over about a square foot of the polished rosewood surface of the table-top. Then he gently blew away the surplus powder, and there appeared the impression of a human hand distinctly registered in saffron. The bulb of the thumb and each fleshy hummock between the joints of the fingers and around the palm stood out like tiny circular islands. All the papillary ridges were clearly discernible. The photographer then hooked his camera to a peculiar adjustable tripod and, carefully focusing his lens, took two flash-light pictures of the hand-mark.

"This ought to do." Dubois was pleased with his find. "It's the right hand—a clear print—and the guy who made it was standing right behind the dame. . . . And it's the newest print in the place."

"What about this box?" Heath pointed to the black document-box on the table near the overturned lamp.

"Not a mark—wiped clean."

Dubois began putting away his paraphernalia.

"I say, Captain Dubois," interposed Vance, "did you take a good look at the inside door-knob of that clothes-press?"

The man swung about abruptly, and gave Vance a glowering look.

"People ain't in the habit of handling the inside knobs of closet doors. They open and shut closets from the outside."

Vance raised his eyebrows in simulated astonishment.

"Do they, now, really?—Fancy that! . . . Still, don't y' know, if one were inside the closet, one couldn't reach the outside knob."

"The people *I* know don't shut themselves in clothes-closets." Dubois's tone was ponderously sarcastic.

"You positively amaze me!" declared Vance. "All the people I know are addicted to the habit—a sort of daily pastime, don't y' know."

Markham, always diplomatic, intervened.

"What idea have you about that closet, Vance?"

"Alas! I wish I had one," was the dolorous answer. "It's because I can't, for the life of me, make sense of its neat and orderly appearance that I'm so

interested in it. Really, y' know, it should have been artistically looted."

Heath was not entirely free from the same vague misgivings that were disturbing Vance, for he turned to Dubois and said.

"You might go over the knob, Captain. As this gentleman says, there's something funny about the condition of that closet."

Dubois, silent and surly, went to the closet door and sprayed his yellow powder over the inside knob. When he had blown the loose particles away, he bent over it with his magnifying-glass. At length he straightened up, and gave Vance a look of ill-natured appraisal.

"There's fresh prints on it, all right," he grudgingly admitted; "and unless I'm mistaken they were made by the same hand as those on the table. Both thumb-marks are ulnar loops, and the index-fingers are both whorl patterns. . . . Here, Pete," he ordered the photographer, "make some shots of that knob."

When this had been done, Dubois, Bellamy, and the photographer left us.

A few moments later, after an interchange of pleasantries, Inspector Moran also departed. At the door he passed two men in the white uniform of internes, who had come to take away the girl's body.

CHAPTER V

THE BOLTED DOOR

(Tuesday, September 11; 10.30 a. m.)

Markham and Heath and Vance and I were now alone in the apartment. Dark, low-hanging clouds had drifted across the sun, and the gray spectral light intensified the tragic atmosphere of the rooms. Markham had lighted a cigar, and stood leaning against the piano, looking about him with a disconsolate but determined air. Vance had moved over to one of the pictures on the side wall of the living-room—Boucher's "La Bergère Endormie" I think it was—and stood looking at it with cynical contempt.

"Dimpled nudities, gambolling Cupids and woolly clouds for royal cocottes," he commented. His distaste for all the painting of the French decadence under Louis XV was profound. "One wonders what pictures courtesans hung in their boudoirs before the invention of these amorous eclogues, with their blue verdure and beribboned sheep."

"I'm more interested at present in what took place in this particular boudoir last night," retorted Markham impatiently.

"There's not much doubt about that, sir," said Heath encouragingly. "And I've an idea that when

Dubois checks up those finger-prints with our files, we'll about know who did it."

Vance turned toward him with a rueful smile.

"You're so trusting, Sergeant. I, in turn, have an idea that, long before this touchin' case is clarified, you'll wish the irascible Captain with the insect-powder had never found those finger-prints." He made a playful gesture of emphasis. "Permit me to whisper into your ear that the person who left his sign-manuals on yonder rosewood table and cut-glass door-knob had nothing whatever to do with the precipitate demise of the fair Mademoiselle Odell."

"What is it you suspect?" demanded Markham sharply.

"Not a thing, old dear," blandly declared Vance. "I'm wandering about in a mental murk as empty of sign-posts as interplanetary space. The jaws of darkness do devour me up; I'm in the dead vast and middle of the night. My mental darkness is Egyptian, Stygian, Cimmerian—I'm in a perfect Erebus of tenebrosity."

Markham's jaw tightened in exasperation; he was familiar with this evasive loquacity of Vance's. Dismissing the subject, he addressed himself to Heath.

"Have you done any questioning of the people in the house here?"

"I talked to Odell's maid and to the janitor and the switchboard operators, but I didn't go much into details—I was waiting for you. I'll say this, though: what they did tell me made my head swim. If they don't back down on some of their statements, we're up against it."

"Let's have them in now, then," suggested Markham; "the maid first." He sat down on the piano-bench with his back to the keyboard.

Heath rose, but instead of going to the door, walked to the oriel window.

"There's one thing I want to call your attention to, sir, before you interview these people, and that's the matter of entrances and exits in this apartment." He drew aside the gold-gauze curtain. "Look at that iron grating. All the windows in this place, including the ones in the bathroom, are equipped with iron bars just like these. It's only eight or ten feet to the ground here, and whoever built this house wasn't taking any chances of burglars getting in through the windows."

He released the curtain, and strode into the foyer.

"Now, there's only one entrance to this apartment, and that's this door here opening off the main hall. There isn't a transom or an air-shaft or a dumb-waiter in the place, and that means that the only way—*the only way*—that anybody can get in or out of this apartment is through this door. Just keep that fact in your mind, sir, while you're listening to the stories of these people. . . . Now, I'll have the maid brought in."

In response to Heath's order a detective led in a mulatto woman about thirty years old. She was neatly dressed, and gave one the impression of capability. When she spoke it was with a quiet, clear enunciation which attested to a greater degree of education than is ordinarily found in members of her class.

Her name, we learned, was Amy Gibson; and the

information elicited by Markham's preliminary questioning consisted of the following facts:

She had arrived at the apartment that morning a few minutes after seven, and, as was her custom, had let herself in with her own key, as her mistress generally slept till late.

Once or twice a week she came early to do sewing and mending for Miss Odell before the latter arose. On this particular morning she had come early to make an alteration in a gown.

As soon as she had opened the door she had been confronted by the disorder of the apartment, for the Venetian-glass doors of the foyer were wide open; and almost simultaneously she had noticed the body of her mistress on the davenport.

She had called at once to Jessup, the night telephone operator then on duty, who, after one glance into the living-room, had notified the police. She had then sat down in the public reception-room and waited for the arrival of the officers.

Her testimony had been simple and direct and intelligently stated. If she was nervous or excited, she managed to keep her feelings well under control.

"Now," continued Markham, after a short pause, "let us go back to last night.—At what time did you leave Miss Odell?"

"A few minutes before seven, sir," the woman answered, in a colorless, even tone which seemed to be characteristic of her speech.

"Is that your usual hour for leaving?"

"No; I generally go about six. But last night Miss Odell wanted me to help her dress for dinner."

"Don't you always help her dress for dinner?"

"No, sir. But last night she was going with some gentleman to dinner and the theatre, and wanted to look specially nice."

"Ah!" Markham leaned forward. "And who was this gentleman?"

"I don't know, sir—Miss Odell didn't say."

"And you couldn't suggest who it might have been?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"And when did Miss Odell tell you that she wanted you to come early this morning?"

"When I was leaving last night."

"So she evidently didn't anticipate any danger, or have any fear of her companion."

"It doesn't look that way." The woman paused, as if considering. "No, I know she didn't. She was in good spirits."

Markham turned to Heath.

"Any other questions you want to ask, Sergeant?"

Heath removed an unlighted cigar from his mouth, and bent forward, resting his hands on his knees.

"What jewellery did this Odell woman have on last night?" he demanded gruffly.

The maid's manner became cool and a bit haughty.

"Miss Odell"—she emphasized the "Miss," by way of reproaching him for the disrespect implied in his omission—"wore all her rings, five or six of them, and three bracelets—one of square diamonds, one of rubies, and one of diamonds and emeralds. She also had on a sunburst of pear-shaped diamonds on a chain round her neck, and she carried a platinum lorgnette set with diamonds and pearls."

"Did she own any other jewellery?"

"A few small pieces, maybe, but I'm not sure."

"And did she keep 'em in a steel jewel-case in the bedroom?"

"Yes—when she wasn't wearing them." There was more than a suggestion of sarcasm in the reply.

"Oh, I thought maybe she kept 'em locked up when she had 'em on." Heath's antagonism had been aroused by the maid's attitude; he could not have failed to note that she had consistently omitted the punctilious "sir" when answering him. He now stood up and pointed loweringly to the black document-box on the rosewood table.

"Ever see that before?"

The woman nodded indifferently. "Many times."

"Where was it generally kept?"

"In that thing." She indicated the Boule cabinet with a motion of the head.

"What was in the box?"

"How should I know?"

"You don't know—huh?" Heath thrust out his jaw, but his bullying attitude had no effect upon the impassive maid.

"I've got no idea," she replied calmly. "It was always kept locked, and I never saw Miss Odell open it."

The Sergeant walked over to the door of the living-room closet.

"See that key?" he asked angrily.

Again the woman nodded; but this time I detected a look of mild astonishment in her eyes.

"Was that key always kept on the inside of the door?"

"No; it was always on the outside."

Heath shot Vance a curious look. Then, after a moment's frowning contemplation of the knob, he waved his hand to the detective who had brought the maid in.

"Take her back to the reception-room, Snitkin.

and get a detailed description from her of all the Odell jewellery. . . . And keep her outside; I'll want her again."

When Snitkin and the maid had gone out, Vance lay back lazily on the davenport, where he had sat during the interview, and sent a spiral of cigarette smoke toward the ceiling.

"Rather illuminatin', what?" he remarked. "The dusky demoiselle got us considerably forrader. Now we know that the closet key is on the wrong side of the door, and that our *fille de joie* went to the theatre with one of her favorite *inamorati*, who presumably brought her home shortly before she took her departure from this wicked world."

"You think that's helpful, do you?" Heath's tone was contemptuously triumphant. "Wait till you hear the crazy story the telephone operator's got to tell."

"All right, Sergeant," put in Markham impatiently. "Suppose we get on with the ordeal."

"I'm going to suggest, Mr. Markham, that we question the janitor first. And I'll show you why." Heath went to the entrance door of the apartment, and opened it. "Look here for just a minute, sir."

He stepped out into the main hall, and pointed down the little passageway on the left. It was about ten feet in length, and ran between the Odell apartment and the blank rear wall of the reception-room. At the end of it was a solid oak door which gave on the court at the side of the house.

"That door," explained Heath, "is the only side or rear entrance to this building; and when that door is bolted nobody can get into the house except by the front entrance. You can't even get into the build-

ing through the other apartments, for every window on this floor is barred. I checked up on that point as soon as I got here."

He led the way back into the living-room.

"Now, after I'd looked over the situation this morning," he went on, "I figured that our man had entered through that side door at the end of the passageway, and had slipped into this apartment without the night operator seeing him. So I tried the side door to see if it was open. But it was bolted on the inside—not locked, mind you, but bolted. And it wasn't a slip-bolt, either, that could have been jimmied or worked open from the outside, but a tough old-fashioned turn-bolt of solid brass. . . . And now I want you to hear what the janitor's got to say about it."

Markham nodded acquiescence, and Heath called an order to one of the officers in the hall. A moment later a stolid, middle-aged German, with sullen features and high cheek-bones, stood before us. His jaw was clamped tight, and he shifted his eyes from one to the other of us suspiciously.

Heath straightway assumed the rôle of inquisitor.

"What time do you leave here at night?" He had, for some reason, assumed a belligerent manner.

"Six o'clock—sometimes earlier, sometimes later." The man spoke in a surly monotone. He was obviously resentful at this unexpected intrusion upon his orderly routine.

"And what time do you get here in the morning?"

"Eight o'clock, regular."

"What time did you go home last night?"

"About six—maybe quarter past."

Heath paused and finally lighted the cigar on which he had been chewing at intervals during the past hour.

"Now, tell me about that side door," he went on, with undiminished aggressiveness. "You told me you lock it every night before you leave—is that right?"

"*Ja*—that's right." The man nodded his head affirmatively several times. "Only I don't lock it—I bolt it."

"All right, you bolt it, then." As Heath talked his cigar bobbed up and down between his lips: smoke and words came simultaneously from his mouth. "And last night you bolted it as usual about six o'clock?"

"Maybe a quarter past," the janitor amended, with Germanic precision.

"You're sure you bolted it last night?" The question was almost ferocious.

"*Ja, ja.* Sure, I am. I do it every night. I never miss."

The man's earnestness left no doubt that the door in question had indeed been bolted on the inside at about six o'clock of the previous evening. Heath, however, belabored the point for several minutes, only to be reassured doggedly that the door had been bolted. At last the janitor was dismissed.

"Really, y' know, Sergeant," remarked Vance with an amused smile, "that honest Rheinlander bolted the door."

"Sure, he did," spluttered Heath; "and I found it still bolted this morning at quarter of eight. That's just what messes things up so nice and pretty.

If that door was bolted from six o'clock last evening until eight o'clock this morning, I'd appreciate having some one drive up in a hearse and tell me how the Canary's little playmate got in here last night. And I'd also like to know how he got out."

"Why not through the main entrance?" asked Markham. "It seems the only logical way left, according to your own findings."

"That's how I had it figured out, sir," returned Heath. "But wait till you hear what the phone operator has to say."

"And the phone operator's post," mused Vance, "is in the main hall half-way between the front door and this apartment. Therefore, the gentleman who caused all the disturbance hereabouts last night would have had to pass within a few feet of the operator both on arriving and departing—eh, what?"

"That's it!" snapped Heath. "And, according to the operator, no such person came or went."

Markham seemed to have absorbed some of Heath's irritability.

"Get the fellow in here, and let me question him," he ordered.

Heath obeyed with a kind of malicious alacrity.

CHAPTER VI

A CALL FOR HELP

(Tuesday, September 11; 11 a. m.)

Jessup made a good impression from the moment he entered the room. He was a serious, determined-looking man in his early thirties, rugged and well built; and there was a squareness to his shoulders that carried a suggestion of military training. He walked with a decided limp—his right foot dragged perceptibly—and I noted that his left arm had been stiffened into a permanent arc, as if by an unreduced fracture of the elbow. He was quiet and reserved, and his eyes were steady and intelligent. Markham at once motioned him to a wicker chair beside the closet door, but he declined it, and stood before the District Attorney in a soldierly attitude of respectful attention. Markham opened the interrogation with several personal questions. It transpired that Jessup had been a sergeant in the World War,* had twice been seriously wounded, and had been invalided home shortly before the Armistice. He had held his present post of telephone operator for over a year.

"Now, Jessup," continued Markham, "there are things connected with last night's tragedy that you can tell us."

"Yes, sir." There was no doubt that this ex-

* His full name was William Elmer Jessup, and he had been attached to the 308th Infantry of the 77th Division of the Overseas Forces.

soldier would tell us accurately anything he knew, and also that, if he had any doubt as to the correctness of his information, he would frankly say so. He possessed all the qualities of a careful and well-trained witness.

"First of all, what time did you come on duty last night?"

"At ten o'clock, sir." There was no qualification to this blunt statement; one felt that Jessup would arrive punctually at whatever hour he was due. "It was my short shift. The day man and myself alternate in long and short shifts."

"And did you see Miss Odell come in last night after the theatre?"

"Yes, sir. Every one who comes in has to pass the switchboard."

"What time did she arrive?"

"It couldn't have been more than a few minutes after eleven."

"Was she alone?"

"No, sir. There was a gentleman with her."

"Do you know who he was?"

"I don't know his name, sir. But I have seen him several times before when he has called on Miss Odell."

"You could describe him, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. He's tall and clean-shaven except for a very short gray moustache, and is about forty-five, I should say. He looks—if you understand me, sir—like a man of wealth and position."

Markham nodded. "And now, tell me: did he accompany Miss Odell into her apartment, or did he go immediately away?"

"He went in with Miss Odell, and stayed about half an hour."

Markham's eyes brightened, and there was a suppressed eagerness in his next words.

"Then he arrived about eleven, and was alone with Miss Odell in her apartment until about half past eleven. You're sure of these facts?"

"Yes, sir, that's correct," the man affirmed.

Markham paused and leaned forward.

"Now, Jessup, think carefully before answering: did any one else call on Miss Odell at any time last night?"

"No one, sir," was the unhesitating reply.

"How can you be so sure?"

"I would have seen them, sir. They would have had to pass the switchboard in order to reach this apartment."

"And don't you ever leave the switchboard?" asked Markham.

"No, sir," the man assured him vigorously, as if protesting against the implication that he would desert a post of duty. "When I want a drink of water, or go to the toilet, I use the little lavatory in the reception-room; but I always hold the door open and keep my eye on the switchboard in case the pilot-light should show up for a telephone call. Nobody could walk down the hall, even if I was in the lavatory, without my seeing them."

One could well believe that the conscientious Jessup kept his eye at all times on the switchboard lest a call should flash and go unanswered. The man's earnestness and reliability were obvious; and there was no doubt in any of our minds, I think, that if

Miss Odell had had another visitor that night, Jessup would have known of it.

But Heath, with the thoroughness of his nature, rose quickly and stepped out into the main hall. In a moment he returned, looking troubled but satisfied.

"Right!" he nodded to Markham. "The lavatory door's on a direct unobstructed line with the switchboard."

Jessup took no notice of this verification of his statement, and stood, his eyes attentively on the District Attorney, awaiting any further questions that might be asked him. There was something both admirable and confidence-inspiring in his unruffled demeanor.

"What about last night?" resumed Markham. "Did you leave the switchboard often, or for long?"

"Just once, sir; and then only to go to the lavatory for a minute or two. But I watched the board the whole time."

"And you'd be willing to state on oath that no one else called on Miss Odell from ten o'clock on, and that no one, except her escort, left her apartment after that hour?"

"Yes, sir, I would."

He was plainly telling the truth, and Markham pondered several moments before proceeding.

"What about the side door?"

"That's kept locked all night, sir. The janitor bolts it when he leaves, and unbolts it in the morning. I never touch it."

Markham leaned back and turned to Heath.

"The testimony of the janitor and Jessup here," he said, "seems to limit the situation pretty nar-

rowly to Miss Odell's escort. If, as seems reasonable to assume, the side door was bolted all night, and if no other caller came or went through the front door, it looks as if the man we wanted to find was the one who brought her home."

Heath gave a short mirthless laugh.

"That would be fine, sir, if something else hadn't happened around here last night." Then, to Jessup: "Tell the District Attorney the rest of the story about this man."

Markham looked toward the operator with expectant interest; and Vance, lifting himself on one elbow, listened attentively.

Jessup spoke in a level voice, with the alert and careful manner of a soldier reporting to his superior officer.

"It was just this, sir. When the gentleman came out of Miss Odell's apartment at about half past eleven, he stopped at the switchboard and asked me to get him a Yellow Taxicab. I put the call through, and while he was waiting for the car, Miss Odell screamed and called for help. The gentleman turned and rushed to the apartment door, and I followed quickly behind him. He knocked; but at first there was no answer. Then he knocked again, and at the same time called out to Miss Odell and asked her what was the matter. This time she answered. She said everything was all right, and told him to go home and not to worry. Then he walked back with me to the switchboard, remarking that he guessed Miss Odell must have fallen asleep and had a nightmare. We talked for a few minutes about the war, and then the taxicab came. He said good

night, and went out, and I heard the car drive away."

It was plain to see that this epilogue of the departure of Miss Odell's anonymous escort completely upset Markham's theory of the case. He looked down at the floor with a baffled expression, and smoked vigorously for several moments. At last he asked:

"How long was it after this man came out of the apartment that you heard Miss Odell scream?"

"About five minutes. I had put my connection through to the taxicab company, and it was a minute or so later that she screamed."

"Was the man near the switchboard?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, he had one arm resting on it."

"How many times did Miss Odell scream? And just what did she say when she called for help?"

"She screamed twice, and then cried 'Help! Help!'"

"And when the man knocked on the door the second time, what did he say?"

"As near as I can recollect, sir, he said: 'Open the door, Margaret! What's the trouble?'"

"And can you remember her exact words when she answered him?"

Jessup hesitated, and frowned reflectively.

"As I recall, she said: 'There's nothing the matter. I'm sorry I screamed. Everything's all right, so please go home, and don't worry.' . . . Of course, that may not be exactly what she said, but it was something very close to it."

"You could hear her plainly through the door, then?"

"Oh, yes. These doors are not very thick."

Markham rose, and began pacing meditatively. At length, halting in front of the operator, he asked another question:

"Did you hear any other suspicious sounds in this apartment after the man left?"

"Not a sound of any kind, sir," Jessup declared. "Some one from outside the building, however, telephoned Miss Odell about ten minutes later, and a man's voice answered from her apartment."

"What's this!" Markham spun round, and Heath sat up at attention, his eyes wide. "Tell me every detail of that call."

Jessup complied unemotionally.

"About twenty minutes to twelve a trunk-light flashed on the board, and when I answered it, a man asked for Miss Odell. I plugged the connection through, and after a short wait the receiver was lifted from her phone—you can tell when a receiver's taken off the hook, because the guide-light on the board goes out—and a man's voice answered 'Hello.' I pulled the listening-in key over, and, of course, didn't hear any more."

There was silence in the apartment for several minutes. Then Vance, who had been watching Jessup closely during the interview, spoke.

"By the bye, Mr. Jessup," he asked carelessly, "were you yourself, by any chance, a bit fascinated —let us say— by the charming Miss Odell?"

For the first time since entering the room the man appeared ill at ease. A dull flush overspread his cheeks.

"I thought she was a very beautiful lady," he answered resolutely.

Markham gave Vance a look of disapproval, and then addressed himself abruptly to the operator.

"That will be all for the moment, Jessup."

The man bowed stiffly and limped out.

"This case is becoming positively fascinatin'," murmured Vance, relaxing once more upon the davenport.

"It's comforting to know that some one's enjoying it." Markham's tone was irritable. "And what, may I ask, was the object of your question concerning Jessup's sentiments toward the dead woman?"

"Oh, just a vagrant notion struggling in my brain," returned Vance. "And then, y' know, a bit of *boudoir racontage* always enlivens a situation, what?"

Heath, rousing himself from gloomy abstraction, spoke up.

"We've still got the finger-prints, Mr. Markham. And I'm thinking that they're going to locate our man for us."

"But even if Dubois does identify those prints," said Markham, "we'll have to show how the owner of them got into this place last night. He'll claim, of course, they were made prior to the crime."

"Well, it's a sure thing," declared Heath stubbornly, "that there was some man in here last night when Odell got back from the theatre, and that he was still here until after the other man left at half past eleven. The woman's screams and the answering of that phone call at twenty minutes to twelve prove it. And since Doc Doremus said that the murder took place before midnight, there's no getting away from the fact that the guy who was hiding in here did the job."

"That appears incontrovertible," agreed Markham. "And I'm inclined to think it was some one she knew. She probably screamed when he first revealed himself, and then, recognizing him, calmed down and told the other man out in the hall that nothing was the matter. . . . Later on he strangled her."

"And, I might suggest," added Vance, "that his place of hiding was that clothes-press."

"Sure," the Sergeant concurred. "But what's bothering me is how he got in here. The day operator who was at the switchboard until ten last night old me that the man who called and took Odell out to dinner was the only visitor she had."

Markham gave a grunt of exasperation.

"Bring the day man in here," he ordered. "We've got to straighten this thing out. *Somebody* got in here last night, and before I leave I'm going to find out how it was done."

Vance gave him a look of patronizing amusement.

"Y' know, Markham," he said, "I'm not blessed with the gift of psychic inspiration, but I have one of those strange, indescribable feelings, as the minor poets say, that if you really contemplate remaining in this bestrewn boudoir till you've discovered how the mysterious visitor gained admittance here last night, you'd do jolly well to send for your toilet access'ries and several changes of fresh linen—not to mention your pyjamas. The chap who engineered this little *soirée* planned his entrance and exit most carefully and perspicaciously."

Markham regarded Vance dubiously, but made no reply.

CHAPTER VII

A NAMELESS VISITOR

(*Tuesday, September 11; 11.15 a. m.*)

Heath had stepped out into the hall, and now returned with the day telephone operator, a sallow thin young man who, we learned, was named Spively. His almost black hair, which accentuated the pallor of his face, was sleeked back from his forehead with pomade; and he wore a very shallow moustache which barely extended beyond the alæ of his nostrils. He was dressed in an exaggeratedly dapper fashion, in a dazzling chocolate-colored suit cut very close to his figure, a pair of cloth-topped buttoned shoes, and a pink shirt with a stiff turn-over collar to match. He appeared nervous, and immediately sat down in the wicker chair by the door, fingering the sharp creases of his trousers, and running the tip of his tongue over his lips.

Markham went straight to the point.

"I understand you were at the switchboard yesterday afternoon and last night until ten o'clock. Is that correct?"

Spively swallowed hard, and nodded his head. "Yes, sir."

"What time did Miss Odell go out to dinner?"

"About seven o'clock. I'd just sent to the restaurant next door for some sandwiches——"

"Did she go alone?" Markham interrupted his explanation.

"No. A fella called for her."

"Did you know this 'fella'?"

"I'd seen him a couple of times calling on Miss Odell, but I didn't know who he was."

"What did he look like?" Markham's question was uttered with hurried impatience.

Spively's description of the girl's escort tallied with Jessup's description of the man who had accompanied her home, though Spively was more voluble and less precise than Jessup had been. Patently, Miss Odell had gone out at seven and returned at eleven with the same man.

"Now," resumed Markham, putting an added stress on his words, "I want to know who else called on Miss Odell between the time she went out to dinner and ten o'clock when you left the switchboard."

Spively was puzzled by the question, and his thin arched eyebrows lifted and contracted.

"I—don't understand," he stammered. "How could any one call on Miss Odell when she was out?"

"Some one evidently did," said Markham. "And he got into her apartment, and was there when she returned at eleven."

The youth's eyes opened wide, and his lips fell apart.

"My God, sir!" he exclaimed. "So that's how they murdered her!—laid in wait for her! . . ." He stopped abruptly, suddenly realizing his own proximity to the mysterious chain of events that had led up to the crime. "But nobody got into her apart-

ment while I was on duty," he blurted, with frightened emphasis. "Nobody! I never left the board from the time she went out until quitting time."

"Couldn't any one have come in the side door?"

"What! Was it unlocked?" Spively's tone was startled. "It never is unlocked at night. The janitor bolts it when he leaves at six."

"And you didn't unbolt it last night for any purpose? Think!"

"No, sir, I didn't!" He shook his head earnestly.

"And you are positive that no one got into the apartment through the front door after Miss Odell left?"

"Positive! I tell you I didn't leave the board the whole time, and nobody could've got by me without my knowing it. There was only one person that called and asked for her——"

"Oh! So some one did call!" snapped Markham. "When was it? And what happened?—Jog your memory before you answer."

"It wasn't anything important," the youth assured him, genuinely frightened. "Just a fella who came in and rang her bell and went right out again."

"Never mind whether it was important or not." Markham's tone was cold and peremptory. "What time did he call?"

"About half past nine."

"And who was he?"

"A young fella I've seen come here several times to see Miss Odell. I don't know his name."

"Tell me exactly what took place," pursued Markham.

Again Spively swallowed hard and wetted his lips.

"It was like this," he began, with effort. "The fella came in and started walking down the hall, and I said to him: 'Miss Odell isn't in.' But he kept on going, and said: 'Oh, well, I'll ring the bell anyway to make sure.' A telephone call came through just then, and I let him go on. He rang the bell and knocked on the door, but of course there wasn't any answer; and pretty soon he came on back and said: 'I guess you were right.' Then he tossed me half a dollar, and went out."

"You actually saw him go out?" There was a note of disappointment in Markham's voice.

"Sure, I saw him go out. He stopped just inside the front door and lit a cigarette. Then he opened the door and turned toward Broadway."

"'One by one the rosy petals fall,'" came Vance's indolent voice. "A most amusin' situation!"

Markham was loath to relinquish his hope in the criminal possibilities of this one caller who had come and gone at half past nine.

"What was this man like?" he asked. "Can you describe him?"

Spively sat up straight, and when he answered, it was with an enthusiasm that showed he had taken special note of the visitor.

"He was good-looking, not so old—maybe thirty. And he had on a full-dress suit and patent-leather pumps, and a pleated silk shirt——"

"What, what?" demanded Vance, in simulated unbelief, leaning over the back of the davenport. "A silk shirt with evening dress! Most extr'ordi-n'ry!"

"Oh, a lot of the best dressers are wearing them," Spively explained, with condescending pride. "It's all the fashion for dancing."

"You don't say—really!" Vance appeared dumbfounded. "I must look into this. . . . And, by the bye, when this Beau Brummel of the silk shirt paused by the front door, did he take his cigarette from a long flat silver case carried in his lower waistcoat pocket?"

The youth looked at Vance in admiring astonishment.

"How did you know?" he exclaimed.

"Simple deduction," Vance explained, resuming his recumbent posture. "Large metal cigarette-cases carried in the waistcoat pocket somehow go with silk shirts for evening wear."

Markham, clearly annoyed at the interruption, cut in sharply with a demand for the operator to proceed with his description.

"He wore his hair smoothed down," Spively continued, "and you could see it was kind of long; but it was cut in the latest style. And he had a small waxed moustache; and there was a big carnation in the lapel of his coat, and he had on chamois gloves. . . ."

"My word!" murmured Vance. "A gigolo!"

Markham, with the incubus of the night clubs riding him heavily, frowned and took a deep breath. Vance's observation evidently had launched him on an unpleasant train of thought.

"Was this man short or tall?" he asked next.

"He wasn't so tall—about my height," Spively explained. "And he was sort of thin."

There was an easily recognizable undercurrent of admiration in his tone, and I felt that this youthful telephone operator had seen in Miss Odell's caller a certain physical and sartorial ideal. This palpable admiration, coupled with the somewhat *outré* clothes affected by the youth, permitted us to read between the lines of his remarks a fairly accurate description of the man who had unsuccessfully rung the dead girl's bell at half past nine the night before.

When Spively had been dismissed, Markham rose and strode about the room, his head enveloped in a cloud of cigar smoke, while Heath sat stolidly watching him, his brows knit.

Vance stood up and stretched himself.

"The absorbin' problem, it would seem, remains *in statu quo*," he remarked airily. "How, oh how, did the fair Margaret's executioner get in?"

"You know, Mr. Markham," rumbled Heath sententiously, "I've been thinking that the fellow may have come here earlier in the afternoon—say, before that side door was locked. Odell herself may have let him in and hidden him when the other man came to take her to dinner."

"It looks that way," Markham admitted. "Bring the maid in here again, and we'll see what we can find out."

When the woman had been brought in, Markham questioned her as to her actions during the afternoon, and learned that she had gone out at about four to do some shopping, and had returned about half past five.

"Did Miss Odell have any visitor with her when you got back?"

"No, sir," was the prompt answer. "She was alone."

"Did she mention that any one had called?"

"No, sir."

"Now," continued Markham, "could any one have been hidden in this apartment when you went home at seven?"

The maid was frankly astonished, and even a little horrified.

"Where could any one hide?" she asked, looking round the apartment.

"There are several possible places," Markham suggested: "in the bathroom, in one of the clothes-closets, under the bed, behind the window draperies. . . ."

The woman shook her head decisively. "No one could have been hidden," she declared. "I was in the bathroom half a dozen times, and I got Miss Odell's gown out of the clothes-closet in the bedroom. As soon as it began to get dark I drew all the window-shades myself. And as for the bed, it's built almost down to the floor; no one could squeeze under it." (I glanced closely at the bed, and realized that this statement was quite true.)

"What about the clothes-closet in this room?" Markham put the question hopefully, but again the maid shook her head.

"Nobody was in there. That's where I keep my own hat and coat, and I took them out myself when I was getting ready to go. I even put away one of Miss Odell's old dresses in that closet before I left."

"And you are absolutely certain," reiterated Markham, "that no one could have been hidden

anywhere in these rooms at the time you went home?"

"Absolutely, sir."

"Do you happen to remember if the key of this clothes-closet was on the inside or the outside of the lock when you opened the door to get your hat?"

The woman paused, and looked thoughtfully at the closet door.

"It was on the outside, where it always was," she announced, after several moments' reflection. "I remember because it caught in the chiffon of the old dress I put away."

Markham frowned and then resumed his questioning.

"You say you don't know the name of Miss Odell's dinner companion last night. Can you tell us the names of any men she was in the habit of going out with?"

"Miss Odell never mentioned any names to me," the woman said. "She was very careful about it, too—secretive, you might say. You see, I'm only here in the daytime, and the gentlemen she knew generally came in the evening."

"And you never heard her speak of any one of whom she was frightened—any one she had reason to fear?"

"No, sir—although there was one man she was trying to get rid of. He was a bad character—I wouldn't have trusted him anywhere—and I told Miss Odell she'd better look out for him. But she'd known him a long time, I guess, and had been pretty soft on him once."

"How do you happen to know this?"

"One day, about a week ago," the maid explained, "I came in after lunch, and he was with her in the other room. They didn't hear me, because the portières were drawn. He was demanding money, and when she tried to put him off, he began threatening her. And she said something that showed she'd given him money before. I made a noise, and then they stopped arguing; and pretty soon he went out."

"What did this man look like?" Markham's interest was reviving.

"He was kind of thin—not very tall—and I'd say he was around thirty. He had a hard face—good-looking, some would say—and pale blue eyes that gave you the shivers. He always wore his hair greased back, and he had a little yellow moustache pointed at the ends."

"Ah!" said Vance. "Our gigolo!"

"Has this man been here since?" asked Markham

"I don't know, sir—not when I was here."

"That will be all," said Markham; and the woman went out.

"She didn't help us much," complained Heath.

"What!" exclaimed Vance. "I think she did remarkably well. She cleared up several moot points."

"And just what portions of her information do you consider particularly illuminating?" asked Markham, with ill-concealed annoyance.

"We now know, do we not," rejoined Vance serenely, "that no one was lying *perdu* in here when the *bonne* departed yesterevening."

"Instead of that fact being helpful," retorted Markham, "I'd say it added materially to the complications of the situation."

"It would appear that way, wouldn't it, now? But, then—who knows?—it may prove to be your brightest and most comfortin' clue. . . . Furthermore, we learned that some one evidently locked himself in that clothes-press, as witness the shifting of the key, and that, moreover, this occultation did not occur until the abigail had gone, or, let us say, after seven o'clock."

"Sure," said Heath with sour facetiousness; "when the side door was bolted and an operator was sitting in the front hall, who swears nobody came in that way."

"It is a bit mystifyin'," Vance conceded sadly.

"Mystifying? It's impossible!" grumbled Markham.

Heath, who was now staring with meditative pugnacity into the closet, shook his head helplessly.

"What I don't understand," he ruminated, "is why, if the fellow was hiding in the closet, he didn't ransack it when he came out, like he did all the rest of the apartment."

"Sergeant," said Vance, "you've put your finger on the crux of the matter. . . . Y' know, the neat, undisturbed aspect of that closet rather suggests that the crude person who rifled these charming rooms omitted to give it his attention because it was locked on the inside and he couldn't open it."

"Come, come!" protested Markham. "That theory implies that there were two unknown persons in here last night."

Vance sighed. "Harrow and alas! I know it. And we can't introduce even one into this apartment logically. . . . Distressin', ain't it?"

Heath sought consolation in a new line of thought.

"Anyway," he submitted, "we know that the fancy fellow with the patent-leather pumps who called here last night at half past nine was probably Odell's lover, and was grafting on her."

"And in just what recondite way does that obvious fact help to roll the clouds away?" asked Vance. "Nearly every modern Delilah has an avaricious *amoroso*. It would be rather singular if there wasn't such a chap in the offing, what?"

"That's all right, too," returned Heath. "But I'll tell you something, Mr. Vance, that maybe you don't know. The men that these girls lose their heads over are generally crooks of some kind—professional criminals, you understand. That's why, knowing that this job was the work of a professional, it don't leave me cold, as you might say, to learn that this fellow who was threatening Odell and grafting on her was the same one who was prowling round here last night. . . . And I'll say this, too: the description of him sounds a whole lot like the kind of high-class burglars that hang out at these swell all-night cafés."

"You're convinced, then," asked Vance mildly, "that this job, as you call it, was done by a professional criminal?"

Heath was almost contemptuous in his reply. "Didn't the guy wear gloves, and use a jimmy? It was a yeggman's job, all right."

CHAPTER VIII

THE INVISIBLE MURDERER

(Tuesday, September 11; 11.45 a. m.)

Markham went to the window and stood, his hands behind him, looking down into the little paved rear yard. After several minutes he turned slowly.

"The situation, as I see it," he said, "boils down to this:—The Odell girl has an engagement for dinner and the theatre with a man of some distinction. He calls for her a little after seven, and they go out together. At eleven o'clock they return. He goes with her into her apartment and remains half an hour. He leaves at half past eleven and asks the phone operator to call him a taxi. While he is waiting the girl screams and calls for help, and, in response to his inquiries, she tells him nothing is wrong and bids him go away. The taxi arrives, and he departs in it. Ten minutes later some one telephones her, and a man answers from her apartment. This morning she is found murdered, and the apartment ransacked."

He took a long draw on his cigar.

"Now, it is obvious that when she and her escort returned last night, there was another man in this place somewhere; and it is also obvious that the

girl was alive after her escort had departed. Therefore, we must conclude that the man who was already in the apartment was the person who murdered her. This conclusion is further corroborated by Doctor Doremus's report that the crime occurred between eleven and twelve. But since her escort did not leave till half past eleven, and spoke with her after that time, we can put the actual hour of the murder as between half past eleven and midnight. . . . These are the inferable facts from the evidence thus far adduced."

"There's not much getting away from 'em," agreed Heath.

"At any rate, they're interestin'," murmured Vance.

Markham, walking up and down earnestly, continued:

"The features of the situation revolving round these inferable facts are as follows:—There was no one hiding in the apartment at seven o'clock—the hour the maid went home. Therefore, the murderer entered the apartment later. First, then, let us consider the side door. At six o'clock—an hour before the maid's departure—the janitor bolted it on the inside, and both operators disavow emphatically that they went near it. Moreover, you, Sergeant, found it bolted this morning. Hence, we may assume that the door was bolted on the inside all night, and that nobody could have entered that way. Consequently, we are driven to the inevitable alternative that the murderer entered by the front door. Now, let us consider this other means of entry. The phone operator who was on duty until ten o'clock last night

asserts positively that the only person who entered the front door and passed down the main hall to this apartment was a man who rang the bell and, getting no answer, immediately walked out again. The other operator, who was on duty from ten o'clock until this morning, asserts with equal positiveness that no one entered the front door and passed the switchboard coming to this apartment. Add to all this the fact that every window on this floor is barred, and that no one from up-stairs can descend into the main hall without coming face to face with the operator, and we are, for the moment, confronted with an impasse."

Heath scratched his head, and laughed mirthlessly.

"It don't make sense, does it, sir?"

"What about the next apartment?" asked Vance, "the one with the door facing the rear passageway —No. 2, I think?"

Heath turned to him patronizingly. "I looked into that the first thing this morning. Apartment No. 2 is occupied by a single woman; and I woke her up at eight o'clock and searched the place. Nothing there. Anyway, you have to walk past the switchboard to reach her apartment the same as you do to reach this one; and nobody called on her or left her apartment last night. What's more, Jessup, who's a shrewd sound lad, told me this woman is a quiet, ladylike sort, and that she and Odell didn't even know each other."

"You're so thorough, Sergeant!" murmured Vance.

"Of course," put in Markham, "it would have

been possible for some one from the other apartment to have slipped in here behind the operator's back between seven and eleven, and then to have slipped back after the murder. But as Sergeant Heath's search this morning failed to uncover any one, we can eliminate the possibility of our man having operated from that quarter."

"I dare say you're right," Vance indifferently admitted. "But it strikes me, Markham old dear, that your own affectin' recapitulation of the situation jolly well eliminates the possibility of your man's having operated from any quarter. . . . And yet he came in, garroted the unfortunate damsel, and departed—eh, what? . . . It's a charmin' little problem. I wouldn't have missed it for worlds."

"It's uncanny," pronounced Markham gloomily.

"It's positively spiritualistic," amended Vance. "It has the caressin' odor of a séance. Really, y' know, I'm beginning to suspect that some medium was hovering in the vicinage last night doing some rather tip-top materializations. . . . I say, Markham, could you get an indictment against an ectoplasmic emanation?"

"It wasn't no spook that made those finger-prints," growled Heath, with surly truculence.

Markham halted his nervous pacing and regarded Vance irritably.

"Damn it! This is rank nonsense. The man got in some way, and he got out, too. There's something wrong somewhere. Either the maid is mistaken about some one being here when she left, or else one of those phone operators went to sleep and won't admit it."

"Or else one of 'em's lying," supplemented Heath.

Vance shook his head. "The dusky *fille de chambre*, I'd say, is eminently trustworthy. And if there was any doubt about any one's having come in the front door unnoticed, the lads on the switchboard would, in the present circumstances, be only too eager to admit it. . . . No, Markham, you'll simply have to approach this affair from the astral plane, so to speak."

Markham grunted his distaste of Vance's jocularity.

"That line of investigation I leave to you with your metaphysical theories and esoteric hypotheses."

"But, consider," protested Vance banteringly. "You've proved conclusively—or, rather, you've demonstrated legally—that no one could have entered or departed from this apartment last night; and, as you've often told me, a court of law must decide all matters, not in accord with the known or suspected facts, but according to the evidence; and the evidence in this case would prove a sound alibi for every corporeal being extant. And yet, it's not exactly tenable, d' ye see, that the lady strangled herself. If only it had been poison, what an exquisite and satisfyin' suicide case you'd have! . . . Most inconsiderate of her homicidal visitor not to have used arsenic instead of his hands!"

"Well, he strangled her," pronounced Heath. "Furthermore, I'll lay my money on the fellow who called here last night at half past nine and couldn't get in. He's the bird I want to talk to."

"Indeed?" Vance produced another cigarette.

"I shouldn't say, to judge from our description of him, that his conversation would prove particularly fascinatin'."

An ugly light came into Heath's eyes.

"We've got ways," he said through his teeth, "of getting damn interesting conversation outa people who haven't no great reputation for repartee."

Vance sighed. "How the Four Hundred needs you, my Sergeant!"

Markham looked at his watch.

"I've got pressing work at the office," he said, "and all this talk isn't getting us anywhere." He put his hand on Heath's shoulder. "I leave you to go ahead. This afternoon I'll have these people brought down to my office for another questioning —maybe I can jog their memories a bit. . . . You've got some line of investigation planned?"

"The usual routine," replied Heath drearily. "I'll go through Odell's papers, and I'll have three or four of my men check up on her."

"You'd better get after the Yellow Taxicab Company right away," Markham suggested. "Find out, if you can, who the man was who left here at half past eleven last night, and where he went."

"Do you imagine for one moment," asked Vance, "that if this man knew anything about the murder, he would have stopped in the hall and asked the operator to call a taxi for him?"

"Oh, I don't look for much in that direction." Markham's tone was almost listless. "But the girl may have said something to him that'll give us a lead."

Vance shook his head facetiously. "O welcome

pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope, thou hovering angel, girt with golden wings!"

Markham was in no mood for chaffing. He turned to Heath, and spoke with forced cheeriness.

"Call me up later this afternoon. I may get some new evidence out of the outfit we've just interviewed. . . . And," he added, "be sure to put a man on guard here. I want this apartment kept just as it is until we see a little more light."

"I'll attend to that," Heath assured him.

Markham and Vance and I went out and entered the car. A few minutes later we were winding rapidly across town through Central Park.

"Recall our recent *conversazione* about footprints in the snow?" asked Vance, as we emerged into Fifth Avenue and headed south.

Markham nodded abstractedly.

"As I remember," mused Vance, "in the hypothetical case you presented there were not only footprints but a dozen or more witnesses—including a youthful prodigy—who saw a figure of some kind cross the hibernal landscape. . . . *Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie!* Here you are in a most beastly pother because of the disheartenin' fact that there are neither footprints in the snow nor witnesses who saw a fleeing figure. In short, you are bereft of both direct and circumstantial evidence. . . . Sad, sad."

He wagged his head dolefully.

"Y' know, Markham, it appears to me that the testimony in this case constitutes conclusive legal proof that no one could have been with the deceased

at the hour of her passing, and that, *ergo*, she is presumably alive. The strangled body of the lady is, I take it, simply an irrelevant circumstance from the standpoint of legal procedure. I know that you learned lawyers won't admit a murder without a body; but how, in sweet Heaven's name, do you get around a *corpus delicti* without a murder?"

"You're talking nonsense" Markham rebuked him, with a show of anger.

"Oh, quite," agreed Vance. "And yet, it's a distressin' thing for a lawyer not to have footprints of some kind, isn't it, old dear? It leaves one so up in the air."

Suddenly Markham swung round. "*You*, of course, don't need footprints, or any other kind of material clues," he flung at Vance tauntingly. "*You* have powers of divination such as are denied ordinary mortals. If I remember correctly, you informed me, somewhat grandiloquently, that, knowing the nature and conditions of a crime, you could lead me infallibly to the culprit, whether he left footprints or not. You recall that boast? . . . Well, here's a crime, and the perpetrator left no footprints coming or going. Be so good as to end my suspense by confiding in me who killed the Odell girl."

Vance's serenity was not ruffled by Markham's ill-humored challenge. He sat smoking lazily for several minutes; then he leaned over and flicked his cigarette ash out of the window.

"'Pon my word, Markham," he rejoined evenly, "I'm half inclined to look into this silly murder. I

think I'll wait, though, and see whom the nonplussed Heath turns up with his inquiries."

Markham grunted scoffingly, and sank back on the cushions.

"Your generosity wrings me," he said.

CHAPTER IX

THE PACK IN FULL CRY

(Tuesday, September 11; afternoon)

On our way down-town that morning we were delayed for a considerable time in the traffic congestion just north of Madison Square, and Markham anxiously looked at his watch.

"It's past noon," he said. "I think I'll stop at the club and have a bite of lunch. . . . I presume that eating at this early hour would be too plebeian for so exquisite a hothouse flower as you."

Vance considered the invitation.

"Since you deprived me of my breakfast," he decided, "I'll permit you to buy me some eggs *Bénédictine*."

A few minutes later we entered the almost empty grill of the Stuyvesant Club, and took a table near one of the windows looking southward over the tree-tops of Madison Square.

Shortly after we had given our order a uniformed attendant entered and, bowing deferentially at the District Attorney's elbow, held out an unaddressed communication sealed in one of the club's envelopes. Markham read it with an expression of growing curiosity, and as he studied the signature a look of mild surprise came into his eyes. At length he looked up and nodded to the waiting attendant. Then, excusing himself, he left us abruptly. It was fully twenty minutes before he returned.

"Funny thing," he said. "That note was from the man who took the Odell woman to dinner and the theatre last night. . . . A small world," he mused. "He's staying here at the club—he's a non-resident member and makes it his headquarters when he's in town."

"You know him?" Vance put the question disinterestedly.

"I've met him several times—chap named Spotswoode." Markham seemed perplexed. "He's a man of family, lives in a country house on Long Island, and is regarded generally as a highly respectable member of society—one of the last persons I'd suspect of being mixed up with the Odell girl. But, according to his own confession, he played around a good deal with her during his visits to New York—'sowing a few belated wild oats,' as he expressed it—and last night took her to Francelle's for dinner and to the Winter Garden afterwards."

"Not my idea of an intellectual, or even edifyin', evening," commented Vance. "And he selected a deuced unlucky day for it. . . . I say, imagine opening the morning paper and learning that your *petite dame* of the preceding evening had been strangled! Disconcertin', what?"

"He's certainly disconcerted," said Markham. "The early afternoon papers were out about an hour ago, and he'd been phoning my office every ten minutes, when I suddenly walked in here. He's afraid his connection with the girl will leak out and disgrace him."

"And won't it?"

"I hardly see the necessity. No one knows who

her escort was last evening; and since he obviously had nothing to do with the crime, what's to be gained by dragging him into it? He told me the whole story, and offered to stay in the city as long as I wanted him to."

"I infer, from the cloud of disappointment that enveloped you when you returned just now, that his story held nothing hopeful for you in the way of clues."

"No," Markham admitted. "The girl apparently never spoke to him of her intimate affairs; and he couldn't give me a single helpful suggestion. His account of what happened last night agreed perfectly with Jessup's. He called for the girl at seven, brought her home at about eleven, stayed with her half an hour or so, and then left her. When he heard her call for help he was frightened, but on being assured by her there was nothing wrong, he concluded she had dozed off into a nightmare, and thought no more of it. He drove direct to the club here, arriving about ten minutes to twelve. Judge Redfern, who saw him descend from the taxi, insisted on his coming up-stairs and playing poker with some men who were waiting in the Judge's rooms for him. They played until three o'clock this morning."

"Your Long Island Don Juan has certainly not supplied you with any footprints in the snow."

"Anyway, his coming forward at this time closes one line of inquiry over which we might have wasted considerable time."

"If many more lines of inquiry are closed," remarked Vance dryly, "you'll be in a distressin' dilemma, don't y' know."

"There are enough still open to keep me busy," said Markham, pushing back his plate and calling for the check. He rose; then pausing, regarded Vance meditatingly. "Are you sufficiently interested to want to come along?"

"Eh, what? My word! . . . Charmed, I'm sure. But, I say, sit down just a moment—there's a good fellow!—till I finish my coffee."

I was considerably astonished at Vance's ready acceptance, careless and bantering though it was, for there was an exhibition of old Chinese prints at the Montross Galleries that afternoon, which he had planned to attend. A Riokai and a Moyeki, said to be very fine examples of Sung painting, were to be shown; and Vance was particularly eager to acquire them for his collection.

We rode with Markham to the Criminal Courts building and, entering by the Franklin Street door, took the private elevator to the District Attorney's spacious but dingy private office which overlooked the gray-stone ramparts of the Tombs. Vance seated himself in one of the heavy leather-upholstered chairs near the carved oak table on the right of the desk, and lighted a cigarette with an air of cynical amusement.

"I await with anticipat'ry delight the grinding of the wheels of justice," he confided, leaning back lazily.

"You are doomed not to hear the first turn of those wheels," retorted Markham. "The initial revolution will take place outside of this office." And he disappeared through a swinging door which led to the judges' chambers.

Five minutes later he returned, and sat down in the high-backed swivel chair at his desk, with his back to the four tall narrow windows in the south wall of the office.

"I just saw Judge Redfern," he explained—"it happened to be the midday recess—and he verified Spotswoode's statement in regard to the poker game. The Judge met him outside of the club at ten minutes before midnight, and was with him until three in the morning. He noted the time because he had promised his guests to be back at half past eleven, and was twenty minutes late."

"Why all this substantiation of an obviously unimportant fact?" asked Vance.

"A matter of routine," Markham told him, slightly impatient. "In a case of this kind every factor, however seemingly remote to the main issue, must be checked."

"Really, y' know, Markham"—Vance laid his head back on the chair and gazed dreamily at the ceiling—"one would think that this eternal routine, which you lawyer chaps worship so devoutly, actually got one somewhere occasionally; whereas it never gets one anywhere. Remember the Red Queen in 'Through the Looking-Glass——'"

"I'm too busy at present to debate the question of routine *versus* inspiration," Markham answered brusquely, pressing a button beneath the edge of his desk.

Swacker, his youthful and energetic secretary, appeared at the door which communicated with a narrow inner chamber between the District Attorney's office and the main waiting-room.

"Yes, Chief?" The secretary's eyes gleamed expectantly behind his enormous horn-rimmed glasses.

"Tell Ben to send me in a man at once." *

Swacker went out through the corridor door, and a minute or two later a suave, rotund man, dressed immaculately and wearing a *pince-nez*, entered, and stood before Markham with an ingratiating smile.

"Morning, Tracy." Markham's tone was pleasant but curt. "Here's a list of four witnesses in connection with the Odell case that I want brought down here at once—the two phone operators, the maid, and the janitor. You'll find them at 184 West 71st Street: Sergeant Heath is holding them there."

"Right, sir." Tracy took the memorandum, and with a priggish, but by no means inelegant, bow went out.

During the next hour Markham plunged into the general work that had accumulated during the forenoon, and I was amazed at the man's tremendous vitality and efficiency. He disposed of as many important matters as would have occupied the ordinary business man for an entire day. Swacker bobbed in and out with electric energy, and various clerks appeared at the touch of a buzzer, took their orders, and were gone with breathless rapidity. Vance, who had sought diversion in a tome of famous arson trials, looked up admiringly from time to time, and shook his head in mild reproach at such spirited activity.

It was just half past two when Swacker announced the return of Tracy with the four witnesses; and for two hours Markham questioned and cross-questioned

* "Ben" was Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, the commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office.

them with a thoroughness and an insight that even I, as a lawyer, had rarely seen equalled. His interrogation of the two phone operators was quite different from his casual questioning of them earlier in the day; and if there had been a single relevant omission in their former testimony, it would certainly have been caught now by Markham's gruelling catechism. But when, at last, they were told they could go, no new information had been brought to light. Their stories now stood firmly grounded: no one—with the exception of the girl herself and her escort, and the disappointed visitor at half past nine—had entered the front door and passed down the hall to the Odell apartment from seven o'clock on; and no one had passed out that way. The janitor reiterated stubbornly that he had bolted the side door a little after six, and no amount of wheedling or aggression could shake his dogged certainty on that point. Amy Gibson, the maid, could add nothing to her former testimony. Markham's intensive examination of her produced only repetitions of what she had already told him.

Not one new possibility—not one new suggestion—was brought out. In fact, the two hours' interlocutory proceedings resulted only in closing up every loophole in a seemingly incredible situation. When, at half past four, Markham sat back in his chair with a weary sigh, the chance of unearthing a promising means of approach to the astonishing problem seemed more remote than ever.

Vance closed his treatise on arson, and threw away his cigarette.

"I tell you, Markham old chap," he grinned, "this case requires umbilicular contemplation, not routine-

Why not call in an Egyptian seeress with a *flair* for crystal-gazing?"

"If this sort of thing goes on much longer," returned Markham dispiritedly, "I'll be tempted to take your advice."

Just then Swacker looked in through the door to say that Inspector Brenner was on the wire. Markham picked up the telephone receiver, and as he listened he jotted down some notes on a pad. When the call had ended, he turned to Vance.

"You seemed disturbed over the condition of the steel jewel-case we found in the bedroom. Well, the expert on burglar tools just called up; and he verifies his opinion of this morning. The case was pried open with a specially made cold chisel such as only a professional burglar would carry or would know how to use. It had an inch-and-three-eighths bevelled bit and a one-inch flat handle. It was an old instrument—there was a peculiar nick in the blade—and is the same one that was used in a successful house-break on upper Park Avenue early last summer. . . . Does that highly exciting information ameliorate your anxiety?"

"Can't say that it does." Vance had again become serious and perplexed. "In fact, it makes the situation still more fantastic. . . . I could see a glimmer of light—eerie and unearthly, perhaps, but still a perceptible illumination—in all this murkiness if it wasn't for that jewel-case and the steel chisel."

Markham was about to answer when Swacker again looked in and informed him that Sergeant Heath had arrived and wanted to see him.

Heath's manner was far less depressed than when we had taken leave of him that morning. He ac-

cepted the cigar Markham offered him, and seating himself at the conference table in front of the District Attorney's desk, drew out a battered note-book.

"We've had a little good luck," he began. "Burke and Emery—two of the men I put on the case—got a line on Odell at the first place they made inquiries. From what they learned, she didn't run around with many men—limited herself to a few live wires, and played the game with what you'd call *finesse*. . . . The principal one—the man who's been seen most with her—is Charles Cleaver."

Markham sat up.

"I know Cleaver—if it's the same one."

"It's him, all right," declared Heath. "Former Brooklyn Tax Commissioner; been interested in a pool-room for pony-betting over in Jersey City ever since. Hangs out at the Stuyvesant Club, where he can hobnob with his old Tammany Hall cronies."

"That's the one," nodded Markham. "He's a kind of professional gay-dog—known as Pop, I believe."

Vance gazed into space.

"Well, well," he murmured. "So old Pop Cleaver was also entangled with our subtle and sanguine Dolores. She certainly couldn't have loved him for his *beaux yeux*."

"I thought, sir," went on Heath, "that, seeing as how Cleaver is always in and out of the Stuyvesant Club, you might ask him some questions about Odell. He ought to know something."

"Glad to, Sergeant." Markham made a note on his pad. "I'll try to get in touch with him to-night. . . . Any one else on your list?"

"There's a fellow named Mannix—Louis Mannix—who met Odell when she was in the 'Follies'; but she chucked him over a year ago, and they haven't been seen together since. He's got another girl now. He's the head of the firm of Mannix and Levine, fur importers, and is one of your night-club rounders—a heavy spender. But I don't see much use of barking up that tree—his affair with Odell went cold too long ago."

"Yes," agreed Markham; "I think we can eliminate him."

"I say, if you keep up this elimination much longer," observed Vance, "you won't have anything left but the lady's corpse."

"And then, there's the man who took her out last night," pursued Heath. "Nobody seems to know his name—he must've been one of those discreet, careful old boys. I thought at first he might have been Cleaver, but the descriptions don't tally. . . . And by the way, sir, here's a funny thing: when he left Odell last night he took the taxi down to the Stuyvesant Club, and got out there."

Markham nodded. "I know all about that, Sergeant. And I know who the man was; and it wasn't Cleaver."

Vance was chuckling.

"The Stuyvesant Club seems to be well in the forefront of this case," he said. "I do hope it doesn't suffer the sad fate of the Knickerbocker Athletic." *

* Vance was here referring to the famous Molineux case, which, in 1898, sounded the death-knell of the old Knickerbocker Athletic Club at Madison Avenue and 45th Street. But it was commercialism that ended the Stuyvesant's career. This club, which stood on the north side of Madison Square, was razed a few years later to make room for a skyscraper.

Heath was intent on the main issue.

"Who was the man, Mr. Markham?"

Markham hesitated, as if pondering the advisability of taking the other into his confidence. Then he said: "I'll tell you his name, but in strict confidence. The man was Kenneth Spotswoode."

He then recounted the story of his being called away from lunch, and of his failure to elicit any helpful suggestions from Spotswoode. He also informed Heath of his verification of the man's statements regarding his movements after meeting Judge Redfern at the club.

"And," added Markham, "since he obviously left the girl before she was murdered, there's no necessity to bother him. In fact, I gave him my word I'd keep him out of it for his family's sake."

"If you're satisfied, sir, I am." Heath closed his note-book and put it away. "There's just one other little thing. Odell used to live on 110th Street, and Emery dug up her former landlady and learned that this fancy guy the maid told us about used to call on her regularly."

"That reminds me, Sergeant." Markham picked up the memorandum he had made during Inspector Brenner's phone call. "Here's some data the Professor gave me about the forcing of the jewel-case."

Heath studied the paper with considerable eagerness. "Just as I thought!" He nodded his head with satisfaction. "Clear-cut professional job, by somebody who's been in the line of work before."

Vance roused himself.

"Still, if such is the case," he said, "why did this experienced burglar first use the insufficient poker?

And why did he overlook the living-room clothes-press?"

"I'll find all that out, Mr. Vance, when I get my hands on him," asserted Heath, with a hard look in his eyes. "And the guy I want to have a nice quiet little chat with is the one with the pleated silk shirt and the chamois gloves."

"*Chacun à son goût*," sighed Vance. "For myself, I have no yearning whatever to hold converse with him. Somehow, I can't just picture a professional looter trying to rend a steel box with a cast-iron poker."

"Forget the poker," Heath advised gruffly. "He jimmied the box with a steel chisel; and that same chisel was used last summer in another burglary on Park Avenue. What about *that?*"

"Ah! That's what torments me, Sergeant. If it wasn't for that disturbin' fact, d' ye see, I'd be light-some and *sans souci* this afternoon, inviting my soul over a dish of tea at Claremont."

Detective Bellamy was announced, and Heath sprang to his feet.

"That'll mean news about those finger-prints," he prophesied hopefully.

Bellamy entered unemotionally, and walked up to the District Attorney's desk.

"Cap'n Dubois sent me over," he said. "He thought you'd want the report on those Odell prints." He reached into his pocket and drew out a small flat folder which, at a sign from Markham, he handed to Heath. "We identified 'em. Both made by the same hand, like Cap'n Dubois said; and that hand belonged to Tony Skeel."

"'Dude' Skeel, eh?" The Sergeant's tone was vibrant with suppressed excitement. "Say, Mr. Markham, that gets us somewhere. Skeel's an ex-convict and an artist in his line."

He opened the folder and took out an oblong card and a sheet of blue paper containing eight or ten lines of typewriting. He studied the card, gave a satisfied grunt, and handed it to Markham. Vance and I stepped up and looked at it. At the top was the familiar rogues'-gallery photograph showing the full face and profile of a regular-featured youth with thick hair and a square chin. His eyes were wide-set and pale, and he wore a small, evenly trimmed moustache with waxed, needle-point ends. Below the double photograph was a brief tabulated description of its sitter, giving his name, aliases, residence, and Bertillon measurements, and designating the character of his illegal profession. Underneath were ten little squares arranged in two rows, each containing a finger-print impression made in black ink—the upper row being the impressions of the right hand, the lower row those of the left.

"So that's the *arbiter elegantiarum* who introduced the silk shirt for full-dress wear! My word!" Vance regarded the identification card satirically. "I wish he'd start a craze for gaiters with dinner-jackets—these New York theatres are frightfully drafty in winter."

Heath put the card back in the folder, and glanced over the typewritten paper that had accompanied it.

"He's our man, and no mistake, Mr. Markham. Listen to this: 'Tony (Dude) Skeel. Two years Elmira Reformatory, 1902 to 1904. One year in the

Baltimore County jail for petit larceny, 1906. Three years in San Quentin for assault and robbery, 1908 to 1911. Arrested Chicago for house-breaking, 1912; case dismissed. Arrested and tried for burglary in Albany, 1913; no conviction. Served two years and eight months in Sing Sing for house-breaking and burglary, 1914 to 1916.'" He folded the paper and put it, with the card, into his breast-pocket. "Sweet little record."

"That dope what you wanted?" asked the imperturbable Bellamy.

"I'll say!" Heath was almost jovial.

Bellamy lingered expectantly with one eye on the District Attorney; and Markham, as if suddenly remembering something, took out a box of cigars and held it out.

"Much obliged, sir," said Bellamy, helping himself to two *Mi Favoritas;* and putting them into his waistcoat pocket with great care, he went out.

"I'll use your phone now, if you don't mind, Mr. Markham," said Heath.

He called the Homicide Bureau.

"Look up Tony Skeel—Dude Skeel—*pronto*, and bring him in as soon as you find him," were his orders to Snitkin. "Get his address from the files, and take Burke and Emery with you. If he's hopped it, send out a general alarm and have him picked up—some of the boys'll have a line on him. Lock him up without booking him, see? . . . And, listen. Search his room for burglar tools: he probably won't have any laying around, but I specially want a one-and-three-eighths-inch chisel with a nick in the blade. . . . I'll be at Headquarters in half an hour."

He hung up the receiver and rubbed his hands together.

"Now we're sailing," he rejoiced.

Vance had gone to the window, and stood staring down on the "Bridge of Sighs," his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Slowly he turned, and fixed Heath with a contemplative eye.

"It simply won't do, don't y' know," he asserted. "Your friend, the Dude, may have ripped open that bally box, but his head isn't the right shape for the rest of last evening's performance."

Heath was contemptuous.

"Not being a phrenologist, I'm going by the shape of his finger-prints."

"A woeful error in the technic of criminal approach, *sergente mio*," replied Vance dulcetly. "The question of culpability in this case isn't so simple as you imagine. It's deuced complicated. And this glass of fashion and mould of form whose portrait you're carryin' next to your heart has merely added to its intricacy."

CHAPTER X

A FORCED INTERVIEW

(Tuesday, September 11; 8 p. m.)

Markham dined at the Stuyvesant Club, as was his custom, and at his invitation Vance and I remained with him. He no doubt figured that our presence at the dinner-table would act as a bulwark against the intrusion of casual acquaintances; for he was in no mood for the pleasantries of the curious. Rain had begun to fall late in the afternoon, and when dinner was over it had turned into a steady downpour which threatened to last well into the night. Dinner over, the three of us sought a secluded corner of the lounge-room, and settled ourselves for a protracted smoke.

We had been there less than a quarter of an hour when a slightly rotund man, with a heavy, florid face and thin gray hair, strolled up to us with a stealthy, self-assured gait, and wished Markham a jovial good evening. Though I had not met the newcomer I knew him to be Charles Cleaver.

"Got your note at the desk saying you wanted to see me." He spoke with a voice curiously gentle for a man of his size; but, for all its gentleness, there was in it a timbre of calculation and coldness.

Markham rose and, after shaking hands, introduced him to Vance and me—though, it seemed, Vance had known him slightly for some time. He

took the chair Markham indicated, and, producing a *Corona Corona*, he carefully cut the end with a gold clipper attached to his heavy watch-chain, rolled the cigar between his lips to dampen it, and lighted it in closely cupped hands.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Mr. Cleaver," began Markham, "but, as you probably have read, a young woman by the name of Margaret Odell was murdered last night in her apartment in 71st Street. . . ."

He paused. He seemed to be considering just how he could best broach a subject so obviously delicate; and perhaps he hoped that Cleaver would volunteer the fact of his acquaintance with the girl. But not a muscle of the man's face moved; and, after a moment, Markham continued.

"In making inquiries into the young woman's life I learned that you, among others, were fairly well acquainted with her."

Again he paused. Cleaver lifted his eyebrows almost imperceptibly, but said nothing.

"The fact is," went on Markham, a trifle annoyed by the other's deliberately circumspect attitude, "my report states that you were seen with her on many occasions during a period of nearly two years. Indeed, the only inference to be drawn from what I've learned is that you were more than casually interested in Miss Odell."

"Yes?" The query was as non-committal as it was gentle.

"Yes," repeated Markham. "And I may add, Mr. Cleaver, that this is not the time for pretenses or suppressions. I am talking to you to-night, in large measure *ex officio*, because it occurred to me that you

could give me some assistance in clearing the matter up. I think it only fair to say that a certain man is now under grave suspicion, and we hope to arrest him very soon. But, in any event, we will need help, and that is why I requested this little chat with you at the club."

"And how can I assist you?" Cleaver's face remained blank; only his lips moved as he put the question.

"Knowing this young woman as well as you did," explained Markham patiently, "you are no doubt in possession of some information—certain facts or confidences, let us say—which would throw light on her brutal, and apparently unexpected, murder."

Cleaver was silent for some time. His eyes had shifted to the wall before him, but otherwise his features remained set.

"I'm afraid I can't accommodate you," he said at length.

"Your attitude is not quite what might be expected in one whose conscience is entirely clear," returned Markham, with a show of resentment.

The man turned a mildly inquisitive gaze upon the District Attorney.

"What has my knowing the girl to do with her being murdered? She didn't confide in me who her murderer was to be. She didn't even tell me that she knew any one who intended to strangle her. If she'd known, she most likely could have avoided being murdered."

Vance was sitting close to me, a little removed from the others, and, leaning over, murmured in my ear *sotto voce:*

"Markham's up against another lawyer—poor dear! . . . A crumplin' situation."

But however inauspiciously this interlocutory skirmish may have begun, it soon developed into a grim combat which ended in Cleaver's complete surrender. Markham, despite his suavity and graciousness, was an unrelenting and resourceful antagonist; and it was not long before he had forced from Cleaver some highly significant information.

In response to the man's ironically evasive rejoinder, he turned quickly and leaned forward.

"You're not on the witness-stand in your own defense, Mr. Cleaver," he said sharply, "however much you appear to regard yourself as eligible for that position."

Cleaver glared back fixedly without replying; and Markham, his eyelids level, studied the man opposite, determined to decipher all he could from the other's phlegmatic countenance. But Cleaver was apparently just as determined that his *vis-à-vis* should decipher absolutely nothing; and the features that met Markham's scrutiny were as arid as a desert. At length Markham sank back in his chair.

"It doesn't matter particularly," he remarked indifferently, "whether you discuss the matter or not here in the club to-night. If you prefer to be brought to my office in the morning by a sheriff with a subpœna, I'll be only too glad to accommodate you."

"That's up to you," Cleaver told him hostilely.

"And what's printed in the newspapers about it will be up to the reporters," rejoined Markham. "I'll explain the situation to them and give them a verbatim report of the interview."

"But I've nothing to tell you." The other's tone was suddenly conciliatory; the idea of publicity was evidently highly distasteful to him.

"So you informed me before," said Markham coldly. "Therefore I wish you good evening."

He turned to Vance and me with the air of a man who had terminated an unpleasant episode.

Cleaver, however, made no move to go. He smoked thoughtfully for a minute or two; then he gave a short, hard laugh which did not even disturb the contours of his face.

"Oh, hell!" he grumbled, with forced good nature. "As you said, I'm not on the witness-stand. . . . What do you want to know?"

"I've told you the situation." Markham's voice betrayed a curious irritation. "You know the sort of thing I want. How did this Odell girl live? Who were her intimates? Who would have been likely to want her out of the way? What enemies had she?—Anything that might lead us to an explanation of her death. . . . And incidentally," he added with tartness, "anything that'll eliminate yourself from any suspected participation, direct or indirect, in the affair."

Cleaver stiffened at these last words, and started to protest indignantly. But immediately he changed his tactics. Smiling contemptuously, he took out a leather pocket-case and, extracting a small folded paper, handed it to Markham.

"I can eliminate myself easily enough," he proclaimed, with easy confidence. "There's a speeding summons from Boonton, New Jersey. Note the date and the time: September the 10th—last night—at

half past eleven. Was driving down to Hopatcong, and was ticketed by a motorcycle cop just as I had passed Boonton and was heading for Mountain Lakes. Got to appear in court there to-morrow morning. Damn nuisance, these country constables." He gave Markham a long, calculating look. "You couldn't square it for me, could you? It's a rotten ride to Jersey, and I've got a lot to do to-morrow."

Markham, who had inspected the summons casually, put it in his pocket.

"I'll attend to it for you," he promised, smiling amiably. "Now tell me what you know."

Cleaver puffed meditatively on his cigar. Then, leaning back and crossing his knees, he spoke with apparent candor.

"I doubt if I know much that'll help you. . . . I liked the Canary, as she was called—in fact, was pretty much attached to her at one time. Did a number of foolish things; wrote her a lot of damn-fool letters when I went to Cuba last year. Even had my picture taken with her down at Atlantic City." He made a self-condemnatory grimace. "Then she began to get cool and distant; broke several appointments with me. I raised the devil with her, but the only answer I got was a demand for money. . . ."

He stopped and looked down at his cigar ash. A venomous hatred gleamed from his narrowed eyes, and the muscles of his jowls hardened.

"No use lying about it. She had those letters and things, and she touched me for a neat little sum before I got 'em back. . . ."

"When was this?"

There was a momentary hesitation. "Last June," Cleaver replied. Then he hurried on: "Mr. Markham"—his voice was bitter—"I don't want to throw mud on a dead person; but that woman was the shrewdest, coldest-blooded blackmailer it's ever been my misfortune to meet. And I'll say this, too: I wasn't the only easy mark she squeezed. She had others on her string. . . . I happen to know she once dug into old Louey Mannix for a plenty—he told me about it."

"Could you give me the names of any of these other men?" asked Markham, attempting to dissemble his eagerness. "I've already heard of the Mannix episode."

"No, I couldn't." Cleaver spoke regretfully. "I've seen the Canary here and there with different men; and there's one in particular I've noticed lately. But they were all strangers to me."

"I suppose the Mannix affair is dead and buried by this time?"

"Yes—ancient history. You won't get any line on the situation from that angle. But there are others—more recent than Mannix—who might bear looking into, if you could find them. I'm easy-going myself; take things as they come. But there's a lot of men who'd go red-headed if she did the things to them that she did to me."

Cleaver, despite his confession, did not strike me as easy-going, but rather as a cold, self-contained, nerveless person whose immobility was at all times dictated by policy and expediency.

Markham studied him closely.

"You think, then, her death may have been due

to vengeance on the part of some disillusioned admirer?"

Cleaver carefully considered his answer.

"Seems reasonable," he said finally. "She was riding for a fall."

There was a short silence; then Markham asked:

"Do you happen to know of a young man she was interested in—good-looking, small, blond moustache, light blue eyes—named Skeel?"

Cleaver snorted derisively.

"That wasn't the Canary's specialty—she let the young ones alone, as far as I know."

At this moment a page-boy approached Cleaver, and bowed.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there's a phone call for your brother. Party said it was important and, as your brother isn't in the club now, the operator thought you might know where he'd gone."

"How would I know?" fumed Cleaver. "Don't ever bother me with his calls."

"Your brother in the city?" asked Markham casually. "I met him years ago. He's a San Franciscan, isn't he?"

"Yes—rabid Californian. He's visiting New York for a couple of weeks so he'll appreciate Frisco more when he gets back."

It seemed to me that this information was given reluctantly; and I got the impression that Cleaver, for some reason, was annoyed. But Markham, apparently, was too absorbed in the problem before him to take notice of the other's disgruntled air, for he reverted at once to the subject of the murder.

"I happen to know one man who has been inter-

ested in the Odell woman recently; he may be the same one you've seen her with—tall, about forty-five, and wears a gray, close-cropped moustache." (He was, I knew, describing Spotswoode.)

"That's the man," averred Cleaver. "Saw them together only last week at Mouquin's."

Markham was disappointed.

"Unfortunately, he's checked off the list. . . . But there must be somebody who was in the girl's confidence. You're sure you couldn't cudgel your brains to any advantage?"

Cleaver appeared to think.

"If it's merely a question of some one who had her confidence," he said, "I might suggest Doctor Lindquist—first name's Ambroise, I think; and he lives somewhere in the Forties near Lexington Avenue. But I don't know that he'd be of any value to you. Still, he was pretty close to her at one time."

"You mean that this Doctor Lindquist might have been interested in her otherwise than professionally?"

"I wouldn't like to say." Cleaver smoked for a while as if inwardly debating the situation. "Anyway, here are the facts: Lindquist is one of these exclusive society specialists—a neurologist he calls himself—and I believe he's the head of a private sanitarium of some kind for nervous women. He must have money, and, of course, his social standing is a vital asset to him—just the sort of man the Canary might have selected as a source of income. And I know this: he came to see her a good deal oftener than a doctor of his type would be apt to. I ran into him one night at her apartment, and when she introduced us, he wasn't even civil."

"It will at least bear looking into," replied Markham unenthusiastically. "You've no one else in mind who might know something helpful?"

Cleaver shook his head.

"No—no one."

"And she never mentioned anything to you that indicated she was in fear of any one, or anticipated trouble?"

"Not a word. Fact is, I was bowled over by the news. I never read any paper but the morning *Herald*—except, of course, *The Daily Racing Form* at night. And as there was no account of the murder in this morning's paper, I didn't hear about it until just before dinner. The boys in the billiard-room were talking about it, and I went out and looked at an afternoon paper. If it hadn't been for that, I might not have known of it till to-morrow morning."

Markham discussed the case with him until half past eight, but could elicit no further suggestions. Finally Cleaver rose to go.

"Sorry I couldn't give you more help," he said. His rubicund face was beaming now, and he shook hands with Markham in the friendliest fashion.

"You wangled that viscid old sport rather cleverly, don't y' know," remarked Vance, when Cleaver had gone. "But there's something deuced queer about him. The transition from his gambler's glassy stare to his garrulous confidences was too sudden—suspiciously sudden, in fact. I may be evil-minded, but he didn't impress me as a luminous pillar of truth. Maybe it's because I don't like those cold, boiled eyes of his—somehow they didn't harmonize with his gushing imitation of open-hearted frankness."

"We can allow him something for his embarrassing position," suggested Markham charitably. "It isn't exactly pleasant to admit having been taken in and blackmailed by a charmer."

"Still, if he got his letters back in June, why did he continue paying court to the lady? Heath reported he was active in that sector right up to the end."

"He may be the complete amorist," smiled Markham.

"Some like Abra, what?——

> 'Abra was ready ere I call'd her name;
> And, though I call'd another, Abra came.'

Maybe—yes. He might qualify as a modern Cayley Drummle."

"At any rate, he gave us, in Doctor Lindquist, a possible source of information."

"Quite so," agreed Vance. "And that's about the only point of his whole passionate unfoldment that I particularly put any stock in, because it was the only point he indicated with any decent reticence. . . . My advice is that you interview this Æsculapius of the fair sex without further delay."

"I'm dog-tired," objected Markham. "Let it wait till to-morrow."

Vance glanced at the great clock over the stone mantel.

"It's latish, I'll admit, but why not, as Pittacus advised, seize time by the forelock?

> 'Who lets slip fortune, her shall never find:
> Occasion once past by, is bald behind.'

But the elder Cato anticipated Cowley. In his 'Disticha de Moribus' he wrote: *Fronte capillata*——"

"Come!" pleaded Markham, rising. "Anything to dam this flow of erudition."

CHAPTER XI

SEEKING INFORMATION

(Tuesday, September 11; 9 p. m.)

Ten minutes later we were ringing the bell of a stately old brownstone house in East 44th Street.

A resplendently caparisoned butler opened the door, and Markham presented his card.

"Take this to the doctor at once, and say that it's urgent."

"The doctor is just finishing dinner," the stately seneschal informed him; and conducted us into a richly furnished reception-room, with deep comfortable chairs, silken draperies, and subdued lights.

"A typical gynecologist's seraglio," observed Vance, looking around. "I'm sure the pasha himself is a majestic and elegant personage."

The prediction proved true. Doctor Lindquist entered the room a moment later inspecting the District Attorney's card as if it had been a cuneiform inscription whose import he could not quite decipher. He was a tall man in his late forties, with bushy hair and eyebrows, and a complexion abnormally pale. His face was long, and, despite the asymmetry of his features, he might easily have been called handsome. He was in dinner clothes, and he carried himself with the self-conscious precision of a man unduly impressed with his own importance. He seated him-

self at a kidney-shaped desk of carved mahogany, and lifted his eyes with polite inquiry to Markham.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this call?" he asked in a studiously melodious voice, lingering over each word caressingly. "You are most fortunate to have found me in," he added, before Markham could speak. "I confer with patients only by appointment." One felt that he experienced a certain humiliation at having received us without elaborate ceremonial preliminaries.

Markham, whose nature was opposed to all circumlocution and pretense, came direct to the point.

"This isn't a professional consultation, doctor; but it happens that I want to speak to you about one of your former patients—a Miss Margaret Odell."

Doctor Lindquist regarded the gold paper-weight before him with vacantly reminiscent eyes.

"Ah, yes. Miss Odell. I was just reading of her violent end. A most unfortunate and tragic affair. . . . In just what way can I be of service to you?—You understand, of course, that the relationship between a physician and his patient is one of sacred confidence——"

"I understand that thoroughly," Markham assured him abruptly. "On the other hand, it is the sacred duty of every citizen to assist the authorities in bringing a murderer to justice. And if there is anything you can tell me which will help toward that end, I shall certainly expect you to tell me."

The doctor raised his hand slightly in polite protestation.

"I shall, of course, do all I can to assist you, if you will but indicate your desires."

"There's no need to beat about the bush, doctor," said Markham. "I know that Miss Odell was a patient of yours for a long time; and I realize that it is highly possible, not to say probable, that she told you certain personal things which may have direct bearing on her death."

"But, my dear Mr. —"—Doctor Lindquist glanced ostentatiously at the card—"ah—Markham, my relations with Miss Odell were of a purely professional character."

"I had understood, however," ventured Markham, "that, while what you say may be technically true, nevertheless there was an informality, let me say, in that relationship. Perhaps I may state it better by saying that your professional attitude transcended a merely scientific interest in her case."

I heard Vance chuckle softly; and I myself could hardly suppress a smile at Markham's verbose and orbicular accusation. But Doctor Lindquist, it seemed, was in no wise disconcerted. Assuming an air of beguiling pensiveness, he said:

"I will confess, in the interests of strict accuracy, that during my somewhat protracted treatment of her case, I came to regard the young woman with a certain—shall I say, fatherly liking? But I doubt if she was even aware of this mild sentiment on my part."

The corners of Vance's mouth twitched slightly. He was sitting with drowsy eyes, watching the doctor with a look of studious amusement.

"And she never at any time told you of any private or personal affairs that were causing her anxiety?" persisted Markham.

Doctor Lindquist pyramided his fingers, and appeared to give the question his undivided thought.

"No, I can't recall a single statement of that nature." His words were measured and urbane. "I know, naturally, in a general way, her manner of living; but the details, you will readily perceive, were wholly outside my province as a medical consultant. The disorganization of her nerves was due—so my diagnosis led me to conclude—to late hours, excitement, irregular and rich eating—what, I believe, is referred to vulgarly as going the pace. The modern woman, in this febrile age, sir——"

"When did you see her last, may I ask?" Markham interrupted impatiently.

The doctor made a pantomime of eloquent surprise.

"When did I see her last? . . . Let me see." He could, apparently, recall the occasion only with considerable difficulty. "A fortnight ago, perhaps—though it may have been longer. I really can't recall. . . . Shall I refer to my files?"

"That won't be necessary," said Markham. He paused, and regarded the doctor with a look of disarming affability. "And was this last visit a paternal or merely a professional one?"

"Professional, of course." Doctor Lindquist's eyes were impassive and only mildly interested; but his face, I felt, was by no means the unedited reflection of his thoughts.

"Did the meeting take place here or at her apartment?"

"I believe I called on her at her home."

"You called on her a great deal, doctor—so I am informed—and at rather unconventional hours. . . .

Is this entirely in accord with your practice of seeing patients only by appointment?"

Markham's tone was pleasant, but from the nature of his question I knew that he was decidedly irritated by the man's bland hypocrisy, and felt that he was deliberatly withholding relevant information.

Before Doctor Lindquist could reply, however, the butler appeared at the door, and silently indicated an extension telephone on a taboret beside the desk. With an unctuously murmured apology, the doctor turned and lifted the receiver.

Vance took advantage of this opportunity to scribble something on a piece of paper and pass it surreptitiously to Markham.

His call completed, Doctor Lindquist drew himself up haughtily, and faced Markham with chilling scorn.

"Is it the function of the District Attorney," he asked distantly, "to harass respectable physicians with insulting questions? I did not know that it was illegal—or even original, for that matter—for a doctor to visit his patients."

"I am not discussing *now*"—Markham emphasized the adverb—"your infractions of the law; but since you suggest a possibility which, I assure you, was not in my mind, would you be good enough to tell me—merely as a matter of form—where you were last night between eleven and twelve?"

The question produced a startling effect. Doctor Lindquist became suddenly like a tautly drawn rope, and, rising slowly and stiffly, he glared, with cold intense venom, at the District Attorney. His velvety mask had fallen off; and I detected another emotion beneath his repressed anger: his expression cloaked

a fear, and his wrath but partly veiled a passionate uncertainty.

"My whereabouts last night is no concern of yours." He spoke with great effort, his breath coming and going noisily.

Markham waited, apparently unmoved, his eyes riveted on the trembling man before him. This calm scrutiny completely broken down the other's self-control.

"What do you mean by forcing yourself in here with your contemptible insinuations?" he shouted. His face, now livid and mottled, was hideously contorted; his hands made spasmodic movements; and his whole body shook as with a tremor. "Get out of here—you and your two myrmidons! Get out, before I have you thrown out!"

Markham, himself enraged now, was about to reply, when Vance took him by the arm.

"The doctor is gently hinting that we go," he said. And with amazing swiftness he spun Markham round, and led him firmly out of the room.

When we were again in the taxicab on our way back to the club, Vance sniggered gaily.

"A sweet specimen, that! Paranoia. Or, more likely, manic-depressive insanity—the *folie circulaire* type: recurring periods of maniacal excitement alternating with periods of the clearest sanity, don't y' know. Anyway, the doctor's disorder belongs in the category of psychoses—associated with the maturation or waning of the sexual instinct. He's just the right age, too. Neurotic degenerate—that's what this oily Hippocrates is. In another minute he would have attacked you. . . . My word! It's

a good thing I came to the rescue. Such chaps are about as safe as rattlesnakes."

He shook his head in a mock discouragement.

"Really, y' know, Markham, old thing," he added, "you should study the cranial indications of your fellow man more carefully—*vultus est index animi.* Did you, by any chance, note the gentleman's wide rectangular forehead, his irregular eyebrows, and pale luminous eyes, and his outstanding ears with their thin upper rims, their pointed tragi and split lobes? . . . A clever devil, this Ambroise—but a moral imbecile. Beware of those pseudo-pyriform faces, Markham; leave their Apollonian Greek suggestiveness to misunderstood women."

"I wonder what he really knows?" grumbled Markham irritably.

"Oh, he knows something—rest assured of that! And if only we knew it, too, we'd be considerably further along in the investigation. Furthermore, the information he is hiding is somewhat unpleasantly connected with himself. His euphoria is a bit shaken. He frightfully overdid the grand manner; his valedict'ry fulmination was the true expression of his feeling toward us."

"Yes," agreed Markham. "That question about last night acted like a petard. What prompted you to suggest my asking it?"

"A number of things—his gratuitous and obviously mendacious statement that he had just read of the murder; his wholly insincere homily on the sacredness of professional confidences; the cautious and Pecksniffian confession of his fatherly regard for the girl; his elaborate struggle to remember when

he had last seen her—this particularly, I think, made me suspicious; and then, the psychopathic indicants of his physiognomy."

"Well," admitted Markham, "the question had its effect. . . . I feel that I shall see this fashionable M.D. again."

"You will," iterated Vance. "We took him unawares. But when he has had time to ponder the matter and concoct an appealin' tale, he'll become downright garrulous. . . . Anyhow, the evening is over, and you can meditate on buttercups till the morrow."

But the evening was not quite over as far as the Odell case was concerned. We had been back in the lounge-room of the club but a short time when a man walked by the corner in which we sat, and bowed with formal courtesy to Markham. Markham, to my surprise, rose and greeted him, at the same time indicating a chair.

"There's something further I wanted to ask you, Mr. Spotswoode," he said, "if you can spare a moment."

At the mention of the name I regarded the man closely, for, I confess, I was not a little curious about the anonymous escort who had taken the girl to dinner and the theatre the night before. Spotswoode was a typical New England aristocrat, inflexible, slow in his movements, reserved, and quietly but modishly dressed. His hair and moustache were slightly gray—which, no doubt, enhanced the pinkness of his complexion. He was just under six feet tall, and well proportioned, but a trifle angular.

Markham introduced him to Vance and me, and briefly explained that we were working with him on

the case, and that he had thought it best to take us fully into his confidence.

Spotswoode gave him a dubious look, but immediately bowed his acceptance of the decision.

"I'm in your hands, Mr. Markham," he replied, in a well-bred but somewhat high-pitched voice, "and I concur, of course, with whatever you think advisable." He turned to Vance with an apologetic smile. "I'm in a rather unpleasant position, and naturally feel a little sensitive about it."

"I'm something of an antinomian," Vance pleasantly informed him. "At any rate, I'm not a moralist; so my attitude in the matter is quite academic."

Spotswoode laughed softly.

"I wish my family held a similar point of view; but I'm afraid they would not be so tolerant of my foibles."

"It's only fair to tell you, Mr. Spotswoode," interposed Markham, "that there is a bare possibility I may have to call you as a witness."

The man looked up quickly, his face clouding over, but he made no comment.

"The fact is," continued Markham, "we are about to make an arrest, and your testimony may be needed to establish the time of Miss Odell's return to her apartment, and also to substantiate the fact that there was presumably some one in her rooms after you had left. Her screams and calls for help, which you heard, may prove vital evidence in obtaining a conviction."

Spotswoode seemed rather appalled at the thought of his relations with the girl becoming public, and for several minutes he sat with averted eyes.

"I see your point," he acknowledged at length. "But it would be a terrible thing for me if the fact of my delinquencies became known."

"That contingency may be entirely avoided," Markham encouraged him. "I promise you that you will not be called upon unless it is absolutely necessary. . . . And now, what I especially wanted to ask you is this: do you happen to know a Doctor Lindquist who, I understand, was Miss Odell's personal physician?"

Spotswoode was frankly puzzled. "I never heard the name," he answered. "In fact, Miss Odell never mentioned any doctor to me."

"And did you ever hear her mention the name of Skeel . . . or refer to any one as Tony?"

"Never." His answer was emphatic.

Markham lapsed into a disappointed silence. Spotswoode, too, was silent: he sat as if in a revery.

"You know, Mr. Markham," he said, after several minutes, "I ought to be ashamed to admit it, but the truth is I cared a good deal for the girl. I suppose you've kept her apartment intact. . . ." He hesitated, and a look almost of appeal came into his eyes. "I'd like to see it again if I could."

Markham regarded him sympathetically, but finally shook his head.

"It wouldn't do. You'd be sure to be recognized by the operator—or there might be a reporter about—and then I'd be unable to keep you out of the case."

The man appeared disappointed, but did not protest; and for several minutes no one spoke. Then Vance raised himself slightly in his chair.

"I say, Mr. Spotswoode, do you happen to re-

member anything unusual occurring last night during the half-hour you remained with Miss Odell after the theatre?"

"Unusual?" The man's manner was eloquent of his astonishment. "To the contrary. We chatted a while, and then, as she seemed tired, I said good night and came away, making a luncheon appointment with her for to-day."

"And yet, it now seems fairly certain that some other man was hiding in the apartment when you were there."

"There's little doubt on that point," agreed Spotswoode, with the suggestion of a shudder. "And her screams would seem to indicate that he came forth from hiding a few minutes after I went."

"And you had no suspicion of the fact when you heard her call for help?"

"I did at first—naturally. But when she assured me that nothing was the matter, and told me to go home, I attributed her screams to a nightmare. I knew she had been tired, and I had left her in the wicker chair near the door, from where her screams seemed to come; so I naturally concluded she had dozed off and called out in her sleep. . . . If only I hadn't taken so much for granted!"

"It's a harrowin' situation." Vance was silent for a while; then he asked: "Did you, by any chance, notice the door of the living-room closet? Was it open or closed?"

Spotswoode frowned, as if attempting to visualize the picture; but the result was a failure.

"I suppose it was closed. I probably would have noticed it if it had been open."

"Then you couldn't say if the key was in the lock or not?"

"Good Lord, no! I don't even know if it ever had a key."

The case was discussed for another half-hour; then Spotswoode excused himself and left us.

"Funny thing," ruminated Markham, "how a man of his upbringing could be so attracted by the empty-headed, butterfly type."

"I'd say it was quite natural," returned Vance. . . . "You're such an incorrigible moralist, Markham."

CHAPTER XII

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

(Wednesday, September 12; 9 a. m.)

The following day, which was Wednesday, not only brought forth an important and, as it appeared, conclusive development in the Odell case, but marked the beginning of Vance's active co-operation in the proceedings. The psychological elements in the case had appealed to him irresistibly, and he felt, even at this stage of the investigation, that a final answer could never be obtained along the usual police lines. At his request Markham had called for him at a little before nine o'clock, and we had driven direct to the District Attorney's office.

Heath was waiting impatiently when we arrived. His eager and covertly triumphant expression plainly indicated good news.

"Things are breaking find and dandy," he announced, when we had sat down. He himself was too elated to relax, and stood before Markham's desk rolling a large black cigar between his fingers. "We got the Dude—six o'clock yesterday evening—and we got him right. One of the C. O. boys, named Riley, who was patrolling Sixth Avenue in the Thirties, saw him swing off a surface car and head for McAnerny's Pawn-Shop. Right away Riley wig-wags the traffic officer on the corner, and follows the Dude into McAnerny's. Pretty soon the traffic

officer comes in with a patrolman, who he's picked up; and the three of 'em nab our stylish friend in the act of pawning this ring."

He tossed a square solitaire diamond in a filigreed platinum setting on the District Attorney's desk.

"I was at the office when they brought him in, and I sent Snitkin with the ring up to Harlem to see what the maid had to say about it, and she identified it as belonging to Odell."

"But, I say, it wasn't a part of the *bijouterie* the lady was wearing that night, was it, Sergeant?" Vance put the question casually.

Heath jerked about and eyed him with sullen calculation.

"What if it wasn't? It came out of that jimmied jewel-case—or I'm Ben Hur."

"Of course it did," murmured Vance, lapsing into lethargy.

"And that's where we're in luck," declared Heath, turning back to Markham. "It connects Skeel directly with the murder and the robbery."

"What has Skeel to say about it?" Markham was leaning forward intently. "I suppose you questioned him."

"I'll say we did," replied the Sergeant; but his tone was troubled. "We had him up all night giving him the works. And the story he tells is this: he says the girl gave him the ring a week ago, and that he didn't see her again until the afternoon of day before yesterday. He came to her apartment between four and five—you remember the maid said she was out then—and entered and left the house by the side door, which was unlocked at that time. He admits he

called again at half past nine that night, but he says that when he found she was out, he went straight home and stayed there. His alibi is that he sat up with his landlady till after midnight playing Khun Khan and drinking beer. I hopped up to his place this morning, and the old girl verified it. But that don't mean anything. The house he lives in is a pretty tough hang-out, and this landlady, besides being a heavy boozer, has been up the river a coupla times for shoplifting."

"What does Skeel say about the finger-prints?"

"He says, of course, he made 'em when he was there in the afternoon."

"And the one on the closet door-knob?"

Heath gave a derisive grunt.

"He's got an answer for that, too—says he thought he heard some one coming in, and locked himself in the clothes-closet. Didn't want to be seen and spoil any game Odell mighta been playing."

"Most considerate of him to keep out of the way of the *belles poires*," drawled Vance. "Touchin' loyalty, what?"

"You don't believe the rat, do you, Mr. Vance?" asked Heath, with indignant surprise.

"Can't say that I do. But our Antonio at least spins a consistent yarn."

"Too damn consistent to suit me," growled the Sergeant.

"That's all you could get out of him?" It was plain that Markham was not pleased with the results of Heath's third degree of Skeel.

"That's about all, sir. He stuck to his story like a leech."

"You found no chisel in his room?"

Heath admitted that he hadn't.

"But you couldn't expect him to keep it around," he added.

Markham pondered the facts for several minutes.

"I can't see that we've got a very good case, however much we may be convinced of Skeel's guilt. His alibi may be thin, but taken in connection with the phone operator's testimony, I'm inclined to think it would hold tight in court."

"What about the ring, sir?" Heath was desperately disappointed. "And what about his threats, and his finger-prints, and his record of similar burglaries?"

"Contributory factors only," Markham explained. "What we need for a murder is more than a *prima facie* case. A good criminal lawyer could have him discharged in twenty minutes, even if I could secure an indictment. It's not impossible, you know, that the woman gave him the ring a week ago—you recall that the maid said he was demanding money from her about that time. And there's nothing to show that the finger-prints were not actually made late Monday afternoon. Moreover, we can't connect him in any way with the chisel, for we don't know who did the Park Avenue job last summer. His whole story fits the facts perfectly; and we haven't anything contradictory to offer."

Heath shrugged helplessly: all the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"What do you want done with him?" he asked desolately.

Markham considered—he, too, was discomfited.

"Before I answer I think I'll have a go at him myself."

He pressed a buzzer, and ordered a clerk to fill out the necessary requisition. When it had been signed in duplicate, he sent Swacker with it to Ben Hanlon.

"Do ask him about those silk shirts," suggested Vance. "And find out, if you can, if he considers a white waistcoat *de rigueur* with a dinner-jacket."

"This office isn't a male millinery shop," snapped Markham.

"But, Markham dear, you won't learn anything else from this Petronius."

Ten minutes later a Deputy Sheriff from the Tombs entered with his handcuffed prisoner.

Skeel's appearance that morning belied his sobriquet of Dude. He was haggard and pale: his ordeal of the previous night had left its imprint upon him. He was unshaven; his hair was uncombed; the ends of his moustache drooped; and his cravat was awry. But despite his bedraggled condition, his manner was jaunty and contemptuous. He gave Heath a defiant leer, and faced the District Attorney with swaggering indifference.

To Markham's questions he doggedly repeated the same story he had told Heath. He clung tenaciously to every detail of it with the ready accuracy of a man who had painstakingly memorized a lesson and was thoroughly familiar with it. Markham coaxed, threatened, bullied. All hint of his usual affability was gone: he was like an inexorable dynamic machine. But Skeel, whose nerves seemed to be made of iron, withstood the vicious fire of his cross-questioning without wincing; and, I confess, his resistance

somewhat aroused my admiration despite my revulsion toward him and all he stood for.

After half an hour Markham gave up, completely baffled in his efforts to elicit any damaging admissions from the man. He was about to dismiss him when Vance rose languidly and strolled to the District Attorney's desk. Seating himself on the edge of it, he regarded Skeel with impersonal curiosity.

"So you're a devotee of Khun Khan, eh?" he remarked indifferently. "Silly game, what? More interestin' than Conquain or Rum, though. Used to be played in the London clubs. Of East Indian origin, I believe. . . . You still play it with two decks, I suppose, and permit round-the-corner mating?"

An involuntary frown gathered on Skeel's forehead. He was used to violent district attorneys, and familiar with the bludgeoning methods of the police, but here was a type of inquisitor entirely new to him; and it was plain that he was both puzzled and apprehensive. He decided to meet this novel antagonist with a smirk of arrogant amusement.

"By the bye," continued Vance, with no change in tone, "can any one hidden in the clothes-press of the Odell living-room see the davenport through the keyhole?"

Suddenly all trace of a smile was erased from the man's features.

"And I say," Vance hurried on, his eyes fixed steadily on the other, "why didn't you give the alarm?"

I was watching Skeel closely, and, though his set expression did not alter, I saw the pupils of his eyes

dilate. Markham, also, I think, noted this phenomenon.

"Don't bother to answer," pursued Vance, as the man opened his lips to speak. "But tell me: didn't the sight shake you up a bit?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Skeel retorted with sullen impertinence. But, for all his sang-froid, one sensed an uneasiness in his manner. There was an overtone of effort in his desire to appear indifferent, which robbed his words of complete conviction.

"Not a pleasant situation, that." Vance ignored his retort. "How did you feel, crouching there in the dark, when the closet door-knob was turned and some one tried to get in?" His eyes were boring into the man.

The muscles of Skeel's face tightened, but he did not speak.

"Lucky thing you took the precaution of locking yourself in—eh, what?" Vance went on. "Suppose he'd got the door open—my word! Then what? . . ."

He paused and smiled with a kind of silky sweetness more impressive than glowering.

"I say, did you have your steel chisel ready for him? Maybe he'd have been too quick and strong for you—maybe there would have been thumbs pressing against your larynx too before you could have struck him—eh? . . . Did you think of that, there in the dark? . . . No, not precisely a pleasant situation. A bit gruesome, in fact."

"What are you raving about?" Skeel spat out insolently. "You're balmy." But his swagger had

been forgotten, and a look akin of horror had passed across his face. This slackening of pose was momentary, however; almost at once his smirk returned, and his head swayed in contempt.

Vance sauntered back to his chair and stretched himself in it listlessly, as if all his interest in the case had again evaporated.

Markham had watched the little drama attentively, but Heath had sat smoking with ill-concealed annoyance. The silence that followed was broken by Skeel.

"Well, I suppose I'm to be railroaded. Got it all planned, have you? . . . Try and railroad me!" He laughed harshly. "My lawyer's Abe Rubin, and you might phone him that I'd like to see him."*

Markham, with a gesture of annoyance, waved the Deputy Sheriff to take Skeel to the Tombs.

"What were you trying to get at?" he asked Vance, when the man was gone.

"Just an elusive notion in the depths of my being struggling for the light." Vance smoked placidly a moment. "I thought Mr. Skeel might be persuaded to pour out his heart to us. So I wooed him with words."

"That's bully," gibed Heath. "I was expecting you any minute to ask if he played mumbly-peg or if his grandmother was a hoot-owl."

"Sergeant, dear Sergeant," pleaded Vance, "don't be unkind. I simply couldn't endure it. . . . And really, now, didn't my chat with Mr. Skeel suggest a possibility to you?"

* Abe Rubin was at that time the most resourceful and unscrupulous criminal lawyer in New York. Since his disbarment two years ago, little has been heard from him.

"Sure," said Heath, "—that he was hiding in the closet when Odell was killed. But where does that get us? It lets Skeel out, although the job was a professional one, and he was caught red-handed with some of the swag."

He turned disgustedly to the District Attorney.

"And now what, sir?"

"I don't like the look of things," Markham complained. "If Skeel has Abe Rubin to defend him, we won't stand a chance with the case we've got. I feel convinced he was mixed up in it; but no judge will accept my personal feelings as evidence."

"We could turn the Dude loose, and have him tailed," suggested Heath grudgingly. "We might catch him doing something that'll give the game away."

Markham considered.

"That might be a good plan," he acceded. "We'll certainly get no more evidence on him as long as he's locked up."

"It looks like our only chance, sir."

"Very well," agreed Markham. "Let him think we're through with him: he may get careless. I'll leave the whole thing to you, Sergeant. Keep a couple of good men on him day and night. Something may happen."

Heath rose, an unhappy man.

"Right, sir. I'll attend to it."

"And I'd like to have more data on Charles Cleaver," added Markham. "Find out what you can of his relations with the Odell girl.—Also, get me a line on Doctor Ambroise Lindquist. What's his history?—what are his habits?—you know the kind

of thing. He treated the girl for some mysterious or imaginary ailment; and I think he has something up his sleeve. But don't go near him personally—yet."

Heath jotted the name down in his note-book, without enthusiasm.

"And before you set your stylish captive free," put in Vance, yawning, "you might, don't y' know, see if he carries a key that fits the Odell apartment."

Heath jerked up short, and grinned.

"Now, that idea's got some sense to it. . . . Funny I didn't think of it myself." And shaking hands with all of us, he went out.

CHAPTER XIII

AN ERSTWHILE GALLANT

(Wednesday, September 12; 10.30 a. m.)

Swacker was evidently waiting for an opportunity to interrupt, for, when Sergeant Heath had passed through the door, he at once stepped into the room.

"The reporters are here, sir," he announced, with a wry face. "You said you'd see them at ten-thirty."

In response to a nod from his Chief, he held open the door, and a dozen or more newspaper men came trooping in.

"No questions, please, this morning," Markham begged pleasantly. "It's too early in the game. But I'll tell you all I know. . . . I agree with Sergeant Heath that the Odell murder was the work of a professional criminal—the same who broke into Arnheim's house on Park Avenue last summer."

Briefly he told of Inspector Brenner's findings in connection with the chisel.

"We've made no arrests, but one may be expected in the very near future. In fact, the police have the case well in hand, but are going carefully in order to avoid any chance of an acquittal. We've already recovered some of the missing jewellery. . . ."

He talked to the reporters for five minutes or so, but he made no mention of the testimony of the maid or the phone operators, and carefully avoided the mention of any names.

When we were again alone, Vance chuckled admiringly.

"A masterly evasion, my dear Markham! Legal training has its advantages—decidedly it has its advantages. . . . 'We've recovered some of the missing jewellery!' Sweet wingèd words! Not an untruth—oh, no!—but how deceivin'! Really, y' know, I must devote more time to the caressin' art of *suggestio falsi* and *suppressio veri.* You should be crowned with an anadem of myrtle."

"Leaving all that to one side," Markham rejoined impatiently, "suppose you tell me, now that Heath's gone, what was in your mind when you applied your verbal voodooism to Skeel. What was all the conjurer-talk about dark closets, and alarums, and pressing thumbs, and peering through keyholes?"

"Well, now, I didn't think my little chit-chat was so cryptic," answered Vance. "The *recherché* Tony was undoubtedly ambuscaded *à la sourdine* in the clothes-press at some time during the fatal evening; and I was merely striving, in my amateurish way, to ascertain the exact hour of his concealment."

"And did you?"

"Not conclusively." Vance shook his head sadly. "Y' know, Markham, I'm the proud possessor of a theory—it's vague and obscure and unsubstantial; and it's downright unintelligible. And even if it were verified, I can't see how it would help us any, for it would leave the situation even more incomprehensible than it already is. . . . I almost wish I hadn't questioned Heath's Beau Nash. He upset my ideas frightfully."

"From what I could gather, you seem to think it

possible that Skeel witnessed the murder. That couldn't, by any stretch of the imagination, be your precious theory?"

"That's part of it, anyway."

"My dear Vance, you do astonish me!" Markham laughed outright. "Skeel, then, according to you, is innocent; but he keeps his knowledge to himself, invents an alibi, and doesn't even tattle when he's arrested. . . . It won't hold water."

"I know," sighed Vance. "It's a veritable sieve. And yet, the notion haunts me—it rides me like a hag—it eats into my vitals."

"Do you realize that this mad theory of yours presupposes that, when Spotswoode and Miss Odell returned from the theatre, there were *two* men hidden in the apartment—two men *unknown to each other*—namely Skeel and your hypothetical murderer?"

"Of course I realize it; and the thought of it is breaking down my reason."

"Furthermore, they must have entered the apartment separately, and hidden separately. . . . How, may I ask, did they get in? And how did they get out? And which one caused the girl to scream after Spotswoode had left? And what was the other one doing in the meantime? And if Skeel was a passive spectator, horrified and mute, how do you account for his breaking open the jewel-case and securing the ring——?"

"Stop! Stop! Don't torture me so," Vance pleaded. "I know I'm insane. Been given to hallucinations since birth; but—Merciful Heaven!—I've never before had one as crazy as this."

"On that point at least, my dear Vance, we are

in complete and harmonious agreement," smiled Markham.

Just then Swacker came in and handed Markham a letter.

"Brought by messenger, and marked 'immediate,'" he explained.

The letter, written on heavy engraved stationery, was from Doctor Lindquist, and explained that between the hours of 11 P. M. and 1 A. M. on Monday night he had been in attendance on a patient at his sanitarium. It also apologized for his actions when asked regarding his whereabouts, and offered a wordy, but not particularly convincing, explanation of his conduct. He had had an unusually trying day, it seemed—neurotic cases were trying, at best—and the suddenness of our visit, together with the apparently hostile nature of Markham's questions, had completely upset him. He was more than sorry for his outburst, he said, and stood ready to assist in any way he could. It was unfortunate for all concerned, he added, that he had lost his temper, for it would have been a simple matter for him to explain about Monday night.

"He has thought the situation over calmly," said Vance, "and hereby offers you a neat little alibi which, I think, you will have difficulty in shaking. . . . An artful beggar—like all these unbalanced pseudo-psychiatrists. Observe: he was with a patient. To be sure! What patient? Why, one too ill to be questioned. . . . There you are. A *cul-de-sac* masquerading as an alibi. Not bad, what?"

"It doesn't interest me overmuch." Markham put the letter away. "That pompous professional ass

could never have got into the Odell apartment without having been seen; and I can't picture him sneaking in by devious means." He reached for some papers. . . . "And now, if you don't object, I'll make an effort to earn my $15,000 salary."

But Vance, instead of making a move to go, sauntered to the table and opened a telephone directory.

"Permit me a suggestion, Markham," he said, after a moment's search. "Put off your daily grind for a bit, and let's hold polite converse with Mr. Louis Mannix. Y' know, he's the only presumptive swain of the inconstant Margaret, so far mentioned, who hasn't been given an audience. I hanker to gaze upon him and hearken to his rune. He'd make the family circle complete, so to speak. . . . He still holds forth in Maiden Lane, I see; and it wouldn't take long to fetch him here."

Markham had swung half round in his chair at the mention of Mannix's name. He started to protest, but he knew from experience that Vance's suggestions were not the results of idle whims; and he was silent for several moments weighing the matter. With practically every other avenue of inquiry closed for the moment, I think the idea of questioning Mannix rather appealed to him.

"All right," he consented, ringing for Swacker; "though I don't see how he can help. According to Heath, the Odell girl gave him his *congé* a year ago."

"He may still have hay on his horns, or, like Hotspur, be drunk with choler. You can't tell." Vance resumed his chair. "With such a name, he'd bear investigation *ipso facto*."

Markham sent Swacker for Tracy; and when the

latter arrived, suave and beaming, he was given instructions to take the District Attorney's car and bring Mannix to the office.

"Get a subpœna," said Markham; "and use it if necessary."

Half an hour or so later Tracy returned.

"Mr. Mannix made no difficulty about coming," he reported. "Was quite agreeable, in fact. He's in the waiting-room now."

Tracy was dismissed, and Mannix ushered in.

He was a large man, and walked with the forced elasticity of gait which epitomizes the silent struggle of incipiently corpulent middle age to deny the on-rush of the years and cling to the semblance of youth. He carried a slender wanghee cane; and his checkered suit, brocaded waistcoat, pearl-gray gaiters, and beribboned Homburg hat gave him an almost foppish appearance. But these various indications of sportiveness were forgotten when one inspected his features. His small eyes were bright and crafty; his nose bibative, and appeared disproportionately small above his sensual lips and prognathous jaw. There was an oiliness in his manner which was repulsive and arresting.

At a gesture from Markham he sat down on the edge of a chair, placing a podgy hand on each knee. His attitude was one of alert suspicion.

"Mr. Mannix," said Markham, an engaging note of apology in his voice, "I am sorry to have discommoded you; but the matter in hand is both serious and urgent. . . . A Miss Margaret Odell was murdered night before last, and in the course of ou-

inquiries we learned that you had at one time known her quite well. It occurred to me that you might be in possession of some facts about her that would assist us in our investigation."

A saponaceous smile, meant to be genial, parted the man's heavy lips.

"Sure, I knew the Canary—a long time ago, y' understand." He permitted himself a sigh. "A fine, high-class girl, if I do say so. A good looker and a good dresser. Too damn bad she didn't go on with the show business. But"—he made a repudiative motion with his hand—"I haven't seen the lady, y' understand, for over a year—not to speak to, if you know what I mean."

Mannix clearly was on his guard, and his beady little eyes did not once leave the District Attorney's face.

"You had a quarrel with her perhaps?" Markham asked the question incuriously.

"Well, now, I wouldn't go so far as to say we quarrelled. No." Mannix paused, seeking the correct word. "You might say we disagreed—got tired of the arrangement and decided to separate; kind of drifted apart. Last thing I told her was, if she ever needed a friend she'd know where to find me."

"Very generous of you," murmured Markham. "And you never renewed your little affair?"

"Never—never. Don't remember ever speaking to her from that day to this."

"In view of certain things I've learned, Mr. Mannix"—Markham's tone was regretful—"I must ask you a somewhat personal question. Did she ever make an attempt to blackmail you?"

Mannix hesitated, and his eyes seemed to grow even smaller, like those of a man thinking rapidly.

"Certainly not!" he replied, with belated emphasis. "Not at all. Nothing of the kind." He raised both hands in protest against the thought. Then he asked furtively: "What gave you such an idea?"

"I have been told," explained Markham, "that she had extorted money from one or two of her admirers."

Mannix made a wholly unconvincing grimace of astonishment.

"Well, well! You don't tell me! Can it be possible?" He peered shrewdly at the District Attorney. "Maybe it was Charlie Cleaver she blackmailed—yes?"

Markham picked him up quickly.

"Why do you say Cleaver?"

Again Mannix waved his thick hand, this time deprecatingly.

"No special reason, y' understand. Just thought it might be him. . . . No special reason."

"Did Cleaver ever tell you he'd been blackmailed?"

"Cleaver tell me? . . . Now, I ask you, Mr. Markham: why should Cleaver tell me such a story—why should he?"

"And you never told Cleaver that the Odell girl had blackmailed you?"

"Positively not!" Mannix gave a scornful laugh which was far too theatrical to have been genuine. "Me tell Cleaver I'd been blackmailed? Now, that's funny, that is."

"Then why did you mention Cleaver a moment ago?"

"No reason at all—like I told you. . . . He knew the Canary; but that ain't no secret."

Markham dropped the subject.

"What do you know about Miss Odell's relations with a Doctor Ambroise Lindquist?"

Mannix was now obviously perplexed.

"Never heard of him—no, never. She didn't know him when I was taking her around."

"Whom else besides Cleaver did she know well?"

Mannix shook his head ponderously.

"Now, that I couldn't say—positively I couldn't say. Seen her with this man and that, same as everybody saw her; but who they were I don't know—absolutely."

"Ever hear of Tony Skeel?" Markham quickly leaned over and met the other's gaze inquiringly.

Once more Mannix hesitated, and his eyes glittered calculatingly.

"Well, now that you ask me, I believe I did hear of the fellow. But I couldn't swear to it, y' understand. . . . What makes you think I heard of this Skeel fellow?"

"Can you think of no one who might have borne Miss Odell a grudge, or had cause to fear her?"

Mannix was volubly emphatic on the subject of his complete ignorance of any such person; and after a few more questions, which elicited only denials, Markham let him go.

"Not bad at all, Markham old thing—eh, what?" Vance seemed pleased with the conference. "Wonder why he's so coy? Not a nice person, this Mannix. And he's so fearful lest he be informative. Again, I wonder why. He was so careful.

"He was sufficiently careful, at any rate, not to tell us anything," declared Markham gloomily.

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know." Vance lay back and smoked placidly. "A ray of light filtered through here and there. Our fur-importing philogynist denied he'd been blackmailed—which was obviously untrue—and tried to make us believe that he and the lovely Margaret cooed like turtle-doves at parting.—Tosh! . . . And then, the mention of Cleaver. That wasn't spontaneous—dear me, no. Brother Mannix and spontaneity are as the poles apart. He had a reason for bringing Cleaver in; and I fancy that if you knew what that reason was, you'd feel like flinging roses riotously, and that sort of thing. Why Cleaver? That *secret-de-Polichinelle* explanation was a bit weak. The orbits of these two paramours cross somewhere. On that point, at least, Mannix inadvertently enlightened us. . . . Moreover, it's plain that he doesn't know our fashionable healer with the satyr ears. But, on the other hand, he's aware of the existence of Mr. Skeel, and would rather like to deny the acquaintance. . . . So—*viola l'affaire.* Plenty of information; but—my word!—what to do with it?"

"I give it up," acknowledged Markham hopelessly.

"I know: it's a sad, sad world," Vance commiserated him. "But you must face the olla podrida with a bright eye. It's time for lunch, and a fillet of sole *Marguéry* will cheer you no end."

Markham glanced at the clock, and permitted himself to be led to the Lawyers Club.

CHAPTER XIV

VANCE OUTLINES A THEORY

(*Wednesday, September 12; evening*)

Vance and I did not return to the District Attorney's office after lunch, for Markham had a busy afternoon before him, and nothing further was likely to transpire in connection with the Odell case until Sergeant Heath had completed his investigations of Cleaver and Doctor Lindquist. Vance had seats for Giordano's "Madame Sans-Gêne," and two o'clock found us at the Metropolitan. Though the performance was excellent, Vance was too *distrait* to enjoy it; and it was significant that, after the opera, he directed the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club. I knew he had a tea appointment, and that he had planned to motor to Longue Vue for dinner; and the fact that he should have dismissed these social engagements from his mind in order to be with Markham showed how intensely the problem of the murder had absorbed his interest.

It was after six o'clock when Markham came in, looking harassed and tired. No mention of the case was made during dinner, with the exception of Markham's casual remark that Heath had turned in his reports on Cleaver and Doctor Lindquist and Mannix. (It seemed that, immediately after lunch, he had telephoned to the Sergeant to add Mannix's name to the two others as a subject for inquiry.) It

was not until we had retired to our favorite corner of the lounge-room that the topic of the murder was brought up for discussion.

And that discussion, brief and one-sided, was the beginning of an entirely new line of investigation—a line which, in the end, led to the guilty person

Markham sank wearily into his chair. He had begun to show the strain of the last two days of fruitless worry. His eyes were a trifle heavy, and there was a grim tenacity in the lines of his mouth. Slowly and deliberately he lighted a cigar, and took several deep inhalations.

"Damn the newspapers!" he grumbled. "Why can't they let the District Attorney's office handle its business in its own way? . . . Have you seen the afternoon papers? They're all clamoring for the murderer. You'd think I had him up my sleeve."

"You forget, my dear chap," grinned Vance, "that we are living under the benign and upliftin' reign of Democritus, which confers upon every ignoramus the privilege of promiscuously criticising his betters."

Markham snorted.

"I don't complain about criticism: it's the lurid imagination of these bright young reporters that galls me. They're trying to turn this sordid crime into a spectacular Borgia melodrama, with passion running rampant, and mysterious influences at work, and all the pomp and trappings of a mediæval romance. . . . You'd think even a schoolboy could see that it was only an ordinary robbery and murder of the kind that's taking place regularly throughout the country."

Vance paused in the act of lighting a cigarette,

and his eyebrows lifted. Turning, he regarded Markham with a look of mild incredulity.

"I say! Do you really mean to tell me that your statement for the press was given out in good faith?"

Markham looked up in surprise.

"Certainly it was. . . . What do you mean by 'good faith'?"

Vance smiled indolently.

"I rather thought, don't y' know, that your oration to the reporters was a bit of strategy to lull the real culprit into a state of false security, and to give you a clear field for investigation."

Markham contemplated him a moment.

"See here, Vance," he demanded irritably, "what are you driving at?"

"Nothing at all—really, old fellow," the other assured him affably. "I knew that Heath was deadly sincere about his belief in Skeel's guilt, but it never occurred to me, d' ye see, that you yourself actually regarded the crime as one committed by a professional burglar. I foolishly thought that you let Skeel go this morning in the hope that he would lead you somehow to the guilty person. I rather imagined you were spoofing the trusting Sergeant by pretending to fall in with his silly notion."

"Ah, I see! Still clinging to your weird theory that a brace of villains were present, hiding in separate clothes-closets, or something of the kind." Markham made no attempt to temper his sarcasm. "A sapient idea—so much more intelligent than Heath's!"

"I know it's weird. But it happens not to be any weirder than your theory of a lone yeggman."

"And for what reason, pray," persisted Markham,

with considerable warmth, "do you consider the yeggman theory weird?"

"For the simple reason that it was not the crime of a professional thief at all, but the wilfully deceptive act of a particularly clever man who doubtless spent weeks in its preparation."

Markham sank back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Vance, you have contributed the one ray of sunshine to an otherwise gloomy and depressing case."

Vance bowed with mock humility.

"It gives me great pleasure," was his dulcet rejoinder, "to be able to bring even a wisp of light into so clouded a mental atmosphere."

A brief silence followed. Then Markham asked:

"Is this fascinating and picturesque conclusion of yours regarding the highly intellectual character of the Odell woman's murderer based on your new and original psychological methods of deduction?" There was no mistaking the ridicule in his voice.

"I arrived at it," explained Vance sweetly, "by the same processes of logic I used in determining the guilt of Alvin Benson's murderer."

Markham smiled.

"*Touché!* . . . Don't think I'm so ungrateful as to belittle the work you did in that case. But this time, I fear, you've permitted your theories to lead you hopelessly astray. The present case is what the police call an open-and-shut affair."

"Particularly shut," amended Vance dryly. "And both you and the police are in the distressin' situation of waiting inactively for your suspected victim to give the game away."

"I'll admit the situation is not all one could desire." Markham spoke morosely. "But even so, I can't see that there's any opportunity in this affair for your recondite psychological methods. The thing's too obvious—that's the trouble. What we need now is evidence, not theories. If it wasn't for the spacious and romantic imaginings of the newspaper men, public interest in the case would already have died out."

"Markham," said Vance quietly, but with unwonted seriousness, "if that's what you really believe, then you may as well drop the case now; for you're foredoomed to failure. You think it's an obvious crime. But let me tell you, it's a subtle crime, if ever there was one. And it's as clever as it is subtle. No common criminal committed it—believe me. It was done by a man of very superior intellect and astoundin' ingenuity."

Vance's assured, matter-of-fact tone had a curiously convincing quality; and Markham, restraining his impulse to scoff, assumed an air of indulgent irony.

"Tell me," he said, "by what cryptic mental process you arrived at so fantastic a conclusion."

"With pleasure." Vance took a few puffs on his cigarette, and lazily watched the smoke curl upward.*

"Y' know, Markham," he began, in his emotionless drawl, "every genuine work of art has a quality which the critics call *élan*—namely, enthusiasm and spontaneity. A copy, or imitation, lacks that dis-

* I sent a proof of the following paragraphs to Vance, and he edited and corrected them; so that, as they now stand, they represent his theories in practically his own words.

tinguishing characteristic; it's too perfect, too carefully done, too exact. Even enlightened scions of the law, I fancy, are aware that there is bad drawing in Botticelli and disproportions in Rubens, what? In an original, d' ye see, such flaws don't matter. But an imitator never puts 'em in: he doesn't dare—he's too intent on getting all the details correct. The imitator works with a self-consciousness and a meticulous care which the artist, in the throes of creative labor, never exhibits. And here's the point: there's no way of imitating that enthusiasm and spontaneity —that *élan*—which an original painting possesses. However closely a copy may resemble an original, there's a vast psychological difference between them. The copy breathes an air of insincerity, of ultra-perfection, of conscious effort. . . . You follow me, eh?"

"Most instructive, my dear Ruskin."

Vance meekly bowed his appreciation, and proceeded pleasantly.

"Now, let us consider the Odell murder. You and Heath are agreed that it is a commonplace, brutal, sordid, unimaginative crime. But, unlike you two bloodhounds on the trail, I have ignored its mere appearances, and have analyzed its various factors—I have looked at it psychologically, so to speak. And I have discovered that it is not a genuine and sincere crime—that is to say, an original—but only a sophisticated, self-conscious and clever imitation, done by a skilful copyist. I grant you it is correct and typical in every detail. But just there is where it fails, don't y' know. Its technic is too good, its craftsmanship too perfect. The *ensemble*, as it were,

is not convincing—it lacks *élan*. Æsthetically speaking, it has all the earmarks of a *tour de force*. Vulgarly speaking, it's a fake." He paused and gave Markham an engaging smile. "I trust this somewhat oracular peroration has not bored you."

"Pray continue," urged Markham, with exaggerated politeness. His manner was jocular, but something in his tone led me to believe that he was seriously interested.

"What is true of art is true of life," Vance resumed placidly. "Every human action, d' ye see, conveys unconsciously an impression either of genuineness or of spuriousness—of sincerity or calculation. For example, two men at table eat in a similar way, handle their knives and forks in the same fashion, and apparently do the identical things. Although the sensitive spectator cannot put his finger on the points of difference, he none the less senses at once which man's breeding is genuine and instinctive and which man's is imitative and self-conscious."

He blew a wreath of smoke toward the ceiling, and settled more deeply into his chair.

"Now, Markham, just what are the universally recognized features of a sordid crime of robbery and murder? . . . Brutality, disorder, haste, ransacked drawers, cluttered desks, broken jewel-cases, rings stripped from the victim's fingers, severed pendant chains, torn clothing, tipped-over chairs, upset lamps, broken vases, twisted draperies, strewn floors, and so forth. Such are the accepted immemorial indications—eh, what? But—consider a moment, old chap. Outside of fiction and the drama, in how many crimes

do they *all* appear—all in perfect ordination, and without a single element to contradict the general effect? That is to say, how many actual crimes are technically perfect in their settings? . . . None! And why? Simply because nothing actual in this life—nothing that is spontaneous and genuine—runs to accepted form in every detail. The law of chance and fallibility invariably steps in."

He made a slight indicative gesture.

"But regard this particular crime: look at it closely. What do you find? You will perceive that its *mise-en-scène* has been staged, and its drama enacted, down to every minute detail—like a Zola novel. It is almost mathematically perfect. And therein, d' ye see, lies the irresistible inference of its having been carefully premeditated and planned. To use an art term, it is a tickled-up crime. Therefore, its conception was not spontaneous. . . . And yet, don't y' know, I can't point out any specific flaw; for its great flaw lies in its being flawless. And nothing flawless, my dear fellow, is natural or genuine."

Markham was silent for a while.

"You deny even the remote possibility of a common thief having murdered the girl?" he asked at length; and now there was no hint of sarcasm in his voice.

"If a common thief did it," contended Vance, "then there's no science of psychology, there are no philosophic truths, and there are no laws of art. If it was a genuine crime of robbery, then, by the same token, there is no difference whatever between an old master and a clever technician's copy."

"You'd entirely eliminate robbery as the motive, I take it."

"The robbery," Vance affirmed, "was only a manufactured detail. The fact that the crime was committed by a highly astute person indicates unquestionably that there was a far more potent motive behind it. Any man capable of so ingenious and clever a piece of deception is obviously a person of education and imagination; and he most certainly would not have run the stupendous risk of killing a woman unless he had feared some overwhelming disaster—unless, indeed, her continuing to live would have caused him greater mental anguish, and would have put him in greater jeopardy, even than the crime itself. Between two colossal dangers, he chose the murder as the lesser."

Markham did not speak at once: he seemed lost in reflection. But presently he turned and, fixing Vance with a dubious stare, said:

"What about that chiselled jewel-box? A professional burglar's jimmy wielded by an experienced hand doesn't fit into your æsthetic hypothesis—it is, in fact, diametrically opposed to such a theory."

"I know it only too well." Vance nodded slowly. "And I've been harried and hectored by that steel chisel ever since I beheld the evidence of its work that first morning. . . . Markham, that chisel is the one genuine note in an otherwise spurious performance. It's as if the real artist had come along at the moment the copyist had finished his faked picture, and painted in a single small object with the hand of a master."

"But doesn't that bring us back inevitably to Skeel?"

"Skeel—ah, yes. That's the explanation, no

doubt; but not the way you conceive it. Skeel ripped the box open—I don't question that; but—deuce take it!—it's the only thing he did do: it's the only thing that was left for him to do. That's why he got only a ring which La Belle Marguerite was not wearing that night. All her other baubles—to wit, those that adorned her—had been stripped from her and were gone."

"Why are you so positive on this point?"

"The poker, man—the poker! . . . Don't you see? That amateurish assault upon the jewel-case with a cast-iron coal-prodder couldn't have been made *after* the case had been prized open—it would have had to be made *before*. And that seemingly insane attempt to break steel with cast iron was part of the stage-setting. The real culprit didn't care if he got the case open or not. He merely wanted it to look as if he had *tried* to get it open; so he used the poker and then left it lying beside the dinted box."

"I see what you mean." This point, I think, impressed Markham more strongly than any other Vance had raised; for the presence of the poker on the dressing-table had not been explained away either by Heath or Inspector Brenner. . . . "Is that the reason you questioned Skeel as if he might have been present when your other visitor was there?"

"Exactly. By the evidence of the jewel-case I knew he either was in the apartment when the bogus crime of robbery was being staged, or else had come upon the scene when it was over and the stage-director had cleared out. . . . From his reactions to my questions I rather fancy he was present."

"Hiding in the closet?"

"Yes. That would account for the closet not having been disturbed. As I see it, it wasn't ransacked, for the simple and rather grotesque reason that the elegant Skeel was locked within. How else could that one clothes-press have escaped the rifling activities of the pseudo-burglar? He wouldn't have omitted it deliberately, and he was far too thoroughgoing to have overlooked it accidentally.—Then there are the finger-prints on the knob. . . ."

Vance lightly tapped on the arm of his chair.

"I tell you, Markham old dear, you simply must build your conception of the crime on this hypothesis, and proceed accordingly. If you don't, each edifice you rear will come toppling about your ears."

CHAPTER XV

FOUR POSSIBILITIES

(Wednesday, September 12; evening)

When Vance finished speaking, there was a long silence. Markham, impressed by the other's earnestness, sat in a brown study. His ideas had been shaken. The theory of Skeel's guilt, to which he had clung from the moment of the identification of the finger-prints, had, it must be admitted, not entirely satisfied him, although he had been able to suggest no alternative. Now Vance had categorically repudiated this theory and at the same time had advanced another which, despite its indefiniteness, had nevertheless taken into account all the physical points of the case; and Markham, at first antagonistic, had found himself, almost against his will, becoming more and more sympathetic to this new point of view.

"Damn it, Vance!" he said. "I'm not in the least convinced by your theatrical theory. And yet, I feel a curious undercurrent of plausibility in your analyses. . . . I wonder——"

He turned sharply, and scrutinized the other steadfastly for a moment.

"Look here! Have you any one in mind as the protagonist of the drama you've outlined?"

"'Pon my word, I haven't the slightest notion as

to who killed the lady," Vance assured him. "But if you are ever to find the murderer, you must look for a shrewd, superior man with nerves of iron, who was in imminent danger of being irremediably ruined by the girl—a man of inherent cruelty and vindictiveness; a supreme egoist; a fatalist more or less; and—I'm inclined to believe—something of a madman."

"Mad!"

"Oh, not a lunatic—just a madman, a perfectly normal, logical, calculating madman—same as you and I and Van here. Only, our hobbies are harmless, d' ye see. This chap's mania is outside your preposterously revered law. That's why you're after him. If his aberration were stamp-collecting, or golf, you wouldn't give him a second thought. But his perfectly rational *penchant* for eliminating *déclassées* ladies who bothered him, fills you with horror: it's not *your* hobby. Consequently, you have a hot yearning to flay him alive."

"I'll admit," said Markham coolly, "that a homicidal mania is my idea of madness."

"But he didn't have a homicidal mania, Markham old thing. You miss all the fine distinctions in psychology. This man was annoyed by a certain person, and set to work, masterfully and reasonably, to do away with the source of his annoyance. And he did it with surpassin' cleverness. To be sure, his act was a bit grisly. But when, if ever, you get your hands on him, you'll be amazed to find how normal he is. And able, too—oh, able no end."

Again Markham lapsed into a long thoughtful silence. At last he spoke.

"The only trouble with your ingenious deductions is that they don't accord with the known circumstances of the case. And facts, my dear Vance, are still regarded by a few of us old-fashioned lawyers as more or less conclusive."

"Why this needless confession of your shortcomings?" inquired Vance whimsically. Then, after a moment: "Let me have the facts which appear to you antagonistic to my deductions."

"Well, there are only four men of the type you describe who could have had any remote reason for murdering the Odell woman. Heath's scouts went into her history pretty thoroughly, and for over two years—that is, since her appearance in the 'Follies' —the only *personæ gratæ* at her apartment have been Mannix, Doctor Lindquist, Pop Cleaver, and, of course, Spotswoode. The Canary was a bit exclusive, it seems; and no other man got near enough to her even to be considered as a possible murderer."

"It appears, then, that you have a complete quartet to draw on." Vance's tone was apathetic. "What do you crave—a regiment?"

"No," answered Markham patiently. "I crave only one logical possibility. But Mannix was through with the girl over a year ago; Cleaver and Spotswoode both have water-tight alibis; and that leaves only Doctor Lindquist, whom I can't exactly picture as a strangler and meretricious burglar, despite his irascibility. Moreover, he, too, has an alibi; and it may be a genuine one."

Vance wagged his head.

"There's something positively pathetic about the childlike faith of the legal mind."

"It does cling to rationality at times, doesn't it?" observed Markham.

"My dear fellow!" Vance rebuked him. "The presumption implied in that remark is most immodest. If you could distinguish between rationality and irrationality you wouldn't be a lawyer—you'd be a god. . . . No; you're going at this thing the wrong way. The real factors in the case are not what you call the known circumstances, but the unknown quantities—the human *x's*, so to speak—the personalities, or natures, of your quartet."

He lit a fresh cigarette, and lay back, closing his eyes.

"Tell me what you know of these four *cavalieri serventi*—you say Heath has turned in his report. Who were their mamas? What do they eat for breakfast? Are they susceptible to poison-ivy? . . . Let's have Spotswoode's *dossier* first. Do you know anything about him?"

"In a general way," returned Markham. "Old Puritan stock, I believe—governors, burgomasters, a few successful traders. All Yankee forebears—no intermixture. As a matter of fact, Spotswoode represents the oldest and hardiest of the New England aristocracy—although I imagine the so-called wine of the Puritans has become pretty well diluted by now. His affair with the Odell girl is hardly consonant with the older Puritans' mortification of the flesh."

"It's wholly consonant, though, with the psychological reactions which are apt to follow the inhibitions produced by such mortification," submitted Vance. "But what does he do? Whence cometh his lucre?"

"His father manufactured automobile accessories, made a fortune at it, and left the business to him. He tinkers at it, but not seriously, though I believe he has designed a few appurtenances."

"I do hope the hideous cut-glass olla for holding paper bouquets is not one of them. The man who invented that tonneau decoration is capable of any fiendish crime."

"It couldn't have been Spotswoode then," said Markham tolerantly, "for he certainly can't qualify as your potential strangler. We know the girl was alive after he left her, and that, during the time she was murdered, he was with Judge Redfern. . . . Even you, friend Vance, couldn't manipulate those facts to the gentleman's disadvantage."

"On that, at least, we agree," conceded Vance. "And that's all you know of the gentleman?"

"I think that's all, except that he married a well-to-do woman—a daughter of a Southern senator, I believe."

"Doesn't help any. . . . And now, let's have Mannix's history."

Markham referred to a typewritten sheet of paper.

"Both parents immigrants—came over in the steerage. Original name Mannikiewicz, or something like that. Born on the East Side; learned the fur business in his father's retail shop in Hester Street; worked for the Sanfrasco Cloak Company, and got to be factory foreman. Saved his money, and sweetened the pot by manipulating real estate; then went into the fur business for himself, and steadily worked up to his present opulent state. Public school, and night commercial college. Married in 1900 and divorced a year

later. Lives a gay life—helps support the night clubs, but never gets drunk. I suppose he comes under the head of a spender and wine-opener. Has invested some money in musical comedies, and always has a stage beauty in tow. Runs to blondes."

"Not very revealin'," sighed Vance. "The city is full of Mannixes. . . . What did you garner in connection with our *bon-ton* medico?"

"The city has its quota of Doctor Lindquists, too, I fear. He was brought up in a small Middle-West bailiwick—French and Magyar extraction; took his M.D. from the Ohio State Medical, practised in Chicago—some shady business there, but never convicted; came to Albany and got in on the X-ray-machine craze; invented a breast-pump and formed a stock company—made a small fortune out of it; went to Vienna for two years——"

"Ah, the Freudian motif!"

"—returned to New York, and opened a private sanitarium; charged outrageous prices, and thereby endeared himself to the *nouveau riche*. Has been at the endearing process ever since. Was defendant in a breach-of-promise suit some years ago, but the case was settled out of court. He's not married."

"He wouldn't be," commented Vance. "Such gentry never are. . . . Interestin' summary, though—yes, decidedly interestin'. I'm tempted to develop a psychoneurosis and let Ambroise treat me. I do so want to know him better. And where—oh, where—was this egregious healer at the moment of our erring sister's demise? Ah, who can tell, my Markham: who knows—who knows?"

"In any event, I don't think he was murdering any one."

"You're so prejudicial!" said Vance. "But let us move reluctantly on.—What's your *portrait parlé* of Cleaver? The fact that he's familiarly called Pop is helpful as a starter. You simply couldn't imagine Beethoven being called Shorty, or Bismarck being referred to as Snookums."

"Cleaver has been a politician most of his life—a Tammany Hall 'regular.' Was a ward-boss at twenty-five; ran a Democratic club of some kind in Brooklyn for a time; was an alderman for two terms, and practised general law. Was appointed Tax Commissioner; left politics, and raised a small racing-stable. Later secured an illegal gambling concession at Saratoga; and now operates a pool-room in Jersey City. He's what you might call a professional sport. Loves his liquor."

"No marriages?"

"None on the records.—But see here: Cleaver's out of it. He was ticketed in Boonton that night at half past eleven."

"Is that, by any chance, the water-tight alibi you mentioned a moment ago?"

"In my primitive legal way I considered it as such." Markham resented Vance's question. "The summons was handed him at half past eleven: it's so marked and dated. And Boonton is fifty miles from here—a good two hours' motor ride. Therefore, Cleaver unquestionably left New York about half past nine; and even if he'd driven directly back, he couldn't have reached here until long after the time the Medical Examiner declared the girl was dead. As a matter of routine, I investigated the summons, and even spoke by phone to the officer who issued it.

It was genuine enough—I ought to know: I had it quashed."

"Did this Boonton Dogberry know Cleaver by sight?"

"No, but he gave me an accurate description of him. And naturally he took the car's number."

Vance looked at Markham with open-eyed sorrow.

"My dear Markham—my very dear Markham—can't you see that all you've actually proved is that a bucolic traffic Nemesis handed a speed-violation summons to a smooth-faced, middle-aged, stout man who was driving Cleaver's car near Boonton at half past eleven on the night of the murder? . . . And, my word! Isn't that exactly the sort of alibi the old boy would arrange if he intended taking the lady's life at midnight or thereabouts?"

"Come, come!" laughed Markham. "That's a bit too far-fetched. You'd give every law-breaker credit for concocting schemes of the most diabolical cunning."

"So I would," admitted Vance apathetically. "And—d'ye know?—I rather fancy that's just the kind of schemes a law-breaker would concoct, if he was planning a murder, and his own life was at stake. What really amazes me is the naïve assumption of you investigators that a murderer gives no intelligent thought whatever to his future safety. It's rather touchin', y' know."

Markham grunted.

"Well, you can take it from me, it was Cleaver himself who got that summons."

"I dare say you're right," Vance conceded. "I merely suggested the possibility of deception, don't

y' know. The only point I really insist on is that the fascinatin' Miss Odell was killed by a man of subtle and superior mentality."

"And I, in turn," irritably rejoined Markham, "insist that the only men of that type who touched her life intimately enough to have had any reason to do it are Mannix, Cleaver, Lindquist, and Spotswoode. And I further insist that not one of them can be regarded as a promising possibility."

"I fear I must contradict you, old dear," said Vance serenely. "They're all possibilities—and one of them is guilty."

Markham glared at him derisively.

"Well, well! So the case is settled! Now, if you'll but indicate which is the guilty one, I'll arrest him at once, and return to my other duties."

"You're always in such haste," Vance lamented. "Why leap and run? The wisdom of the world's philosophers is against it. *Festina lente*, says Cæsar; or, as Rufus has it, *Festinatio tarda est.* And the Koran says quite frankly that haste is of the Devil. Shakespeare was constantly belittling speed:

> 'He tires betimes that spurs too fast betimes';

and

> 'Wisely, and slow; they stumble that run fast.'

Then there was Molière—remember 'Sganarelle'?—: '*Le trop de promptitude à l'erreur nous expose.*' Chaucer also held similar views. 'He hasteth wel,' said he, 'that wysely can abyde.' Even God's common people have embalmed the idea in numberless proverbs: 'Good and quickly seldom meet'; and 'Hasty men never want woe——'"

Markham rose with a gesture of impatience.

"Hell! I'm going home before you start a bedtime story," he growled.

The ironical aftermath of this remark was that Vance did tell a "bedtime story" that night; but he told it to me in the seclusion of his own library; and the gist of it was this:

"Heath is committed, body and soul, to a belief in Skeel's guilt; and Markham is as effectively strangled with legal red tape as the poor Canary was strangled with powerful hands. *Eheu*, Van! There's nothing left for me but to set forth to-morrow *a cappella*, like Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq, and see what can be done in the noble cause of justice. I shall ignore both Heath and Markham, and become as a pelican of the wilderness, an owl of the desert, a sparrow alone upon the housetop. . . . Really, y' know, I'm no avenger of society, but I do detest an unsolved problem."

CHAPTER XVI

SIGNIFICANT DISCLOSURES

(Thursday, September 13; forenoon)

Greatly to Currie's astonishment Vance gave instructions to be called at nine o'clock the following morning; and at ten o'clock we were sitting on his little roof-garden having breakfast in the mellow mid-September sunshine.

"Van," he said to me, when Currie had brought us our second cup of coffee, "however secretive a woman may be, there's always some one to whom she unburdens her soul. A confidant is an essential to the feminine temperament. It may be a mother, or a lover, or a priest, or a doctor, or, more generally, a girl chum. In the Canary's case we haven't a mother or a priest. Her lover—the elegant Skeel—was a potential enemy; and we're pretty safe in ruling out her doctor—she was too shrewd to confide in such a creature as Lindquist. The girl chum, then, remains. And to-day we seek her." He lit a cigarette and rose. "But, first, we must visit Mr. Benjamin Browne of Seventh Avenue."

Benjamin Browne was a well-known photographer of stage celebrities, with galleries in the heart of the city's theatrical district; and as we entered the reception-room of his luxurious studio later that morning my curiosity as to the object of our visit was at the breaking-point. Vance went straight to the desk,

behind which sat a young woman with flaming red hair and mascaro-shaded eyes, and bowed in his most dignified manner. Then, taking a small unmounted photograph from his pocket, he laid it before her.

"I am producing a musical comedy, *mademoiselle*," he said, "and I wish to communicate with the young lady who left this picture of herself with me. Unfortunately I've misplaced her card; but as her photograph bore the imprint of Browne's, I thought you might be good enough to look in your files and tell me who she is and where I may find her."

He slipped a five-dollar bill under the edge of the blotter, and waited with an air of innocent expectancy.

The young woman looked at him quizzically, and I thought I detected the hint of a smile at the corners of her artfully rouged lips. But after a moment she took the photograph without a word and disappeared through a rear door. Ten minutes later she returned and handed Vance the picture. On the back of it she had written a name and address.

"The young lady is Miss Alys La Fosse, and she lives at the Belafield Hotel." There was now no doubt as to her smile. "You really shouldn't be so careless with the addresses of your applicants—some poor girl might lose an engagement." And her smile suddenly turned into soft laughter.

"*Mademoiselle*," replied Vance, with mock seriousness, "in the future I shall be guided by your warning." And with another dignified bow, he went out.

"Good Lord!" he said, as we emerged into

Seventh Avenue. "Really, y' know, I should have disguised myself as an impresario, with a gold-headed cane, a derby, and a purple shirt. That young woman is thoroughly convinced that I'm contemplating an intrigue. . . . A jolly smart *tête-rouge*, that."

He turned into a florist's shop at the corner, and selecting a dozen American Beauties, addressed them to "Benjamin Browne's Receptionist."

"And now," he said, "let us stroll to the Belafield, and seek an audience with Alys."

As we walked across town Vance explained.

"That first morning, when we were inspecting the Canary's rooms, I was convinced that the murder would never be solved by the usual elephantine police methods. It was a subtle and well-planned crime, despite its obvious appearances. No routine investigation would suffice. Intimate information was needed. Therefore, when I saw this photograph of the xanthous Alys half hidden under the litter of papers on the escritoire, I reflected: 'Ah! A girl friend of the departed Margaret's. She may know just the things that are needed.' So, when the Sergeant's broad back was turned, I put the picture in my pocket. There was no other photograph about the place, and this one bore the usual sentimental inscription, 'Ever thine,' and was signed 'Alys.' I concluded, therefore, that Alys had played Anactoria to the Canary's Sappho. Of course I erased the inscription before presenting the picture to the penetrating sibyl at Browne's. . . . And here we are at the Belafield, hopin' for a bit of enlightenment."

The Belafield was a small, expensive apartment-hotel in the East Thirties, which, to judge from the

guests to be seen in the Americanized Queen Anne lobby, catered to the well-off sporting set. Vance sent his card up to Miss La Fosse, and received the message that she would see him in a few minutes. The few minutes, however, developed into three-quarters of an hour, and it was nearly noon when a resplendent bell-boy came to escort us to the lady's apartment.

Nature had endowed Miss La Fosse with many of its arts, and those that Nature had omitted, Miss La Fosse herself had supplied. She was slender and blonde. Her large blue eyes were heavily lashed, but though she looked at one with a wide-eyed stare, she was unable to disguise their sophistication. Her toilet had been made with elaborate care; and as I looked at her, I could not help thinking what an excellent model she would have been for Chéret's pastel posters.

"So you are Mr. Vance," she cooed. "I've often seen your name in *Town Topics*."

Vance gave a shudder.

"And this is Mr. Van Dine," he said sweetly, "—a mere attorney, who, thus far, has been denied the pages of that fashionable weekly."

"Won't you sit down?" (I am sure Miss La Fosse had spoken the line in a play: she made of the invitation an impressive ceremonial.) "I really don't know why I should have received you. But I suppose you called on business. Perhaps you wish me to appear at a society bazaar, or something of the kind. But I'm so busy, Mr. Vance. You simply can't imagine how occupied I am with my work. . . . I just love my work," she added, with an ecstatic sigh.

"And I'm sure there are many thousands of others who love it, too," returned Vance, in his best drawing-room manner. "But unfortunately I have no bazaar to be graced by your charming presence. I have come on a much more serious matter. . . . You were a very close friend of Miss Margaret Odell's——"

The mention of the Canary's name brought Miss La Fosse suddenly to her feet. Her ingratiating air of affected elegance had quickly disappeared. Her eyes flashed, and their lids drooped harshly. A sneer distorted the lines of her cupid's-bow mouth, and she tossed her head angrily.

"Say, listen! Who do you think you are? I don't know nothing, and I got nothing to say. So run along—you and your lawyer."

But Vance made no move to obey. He took out his cigarette-case and carefully selected a *Régie*.

"Do you mind if I smoke?—And won't you have one? I import them direct from my agent in Constantinople. They're exquisitely blended."

The girl snorted, and gave him a look of cold disdain. The doll-baby had become a virago.

"Get yourself outa my apartment, or I'll call the house detective." She turned to the telephone on the wall at her side.

Vance waited until she had lifted the receiver.

"If you do that, Miss La Fosse, I'll order you taken to the District Attorney's office for questioning," he told her indifferently, lighting his cigarette and leaning back in his chair.

Slowly she replaced the receiver and turned.

"What's your game, anyway? . . . Suppose I

did know Margy—then what? And where do you fit into the picture?"

"Alas! I don't fit in at all." Vance smiled pleasantly. "But, for that matter, nobody seems to fit in. The truth is, they're about to arrest a poor blighter for killing your friend, who wasn't in the tableau, either. I happen to be a friend of the District Attorney's; and I know exactly what's being done. The police are scouting round in a perfect frenzy of activity, and it's hard to say what trail they'll strike next. I thought, don't y' know, I might save you a lot of unpleasantness by a friendly little chat. . . . Of course," he added, "if you prefer to have me give your name to the police, I'll do so, and let them hold the audition in their own inimitable but crude fashion. I might say, however, that, as yet, they are blissfully unaware of your relationship with Miss Odell, and that, if you are reasonable, I see no reason why they should be informed of it."

The girl had stood, one hand on the telephone, studying Vance intently. He had spoken carelessly and with a genial inflection; and she at length resumed her seat.

"Now, won't you have one of my cigarettes?" he asked, in a tone of gracious reconciliation.

Mechanically she accepted his offer, keeping her eyes on him all the time, as if attempting to determine how far he was to be trusted.

"Who are they thinking of arresting?" She asked the question with scarcely a movement of her features.

"A johnny named Skeel.—Silly idea, isn't it?"

"Him!" Her tone was one of mingled contempt

and disgust. "That cheap crook? He hasn't got nerve enough to strangle a cat."

"Precisely. But that's no reason for sending him to the electric chair, what?" Vance leaned forward and smiled engagingly. "Miss La Fosse, if you will talk to me for five minutes, and forget I'm a stranger, I'll give you my word of honor not to let the police or the District Attorney know anything about you. I'm not connected with the authorities, but somehow I dislike the idea of seeing the wrong man punished. And I'll promise to forget the source of any information you will be kind enough to give me. If you will trust me, it will be infinitely easier for you in the end."

The girl made no answer for several minutes. She was, I could see, trying to estimate Vance; and evidently she decided that, in any case, she had nothing to lose—now that her friendship with the Canary had been discovered—by talking to this man who had promised her immunity from further annoyance.

"I guess you're all right," she said, with a reservation of dubiety; "but I don't know why I should think so." She paused. "But, look here: I was told to keep out of this. And if I don't keep out of it, I'm apt to be back hoofing it in the chorus again. And that's no life for a sweet young thing like me with extravagant tastes—believe me, my friend!"

"That calamity will never befall you through any lack of discretion on my part," Vance assured her, with good-natured earnestness. . . . "Who told you to keep out of it?"

"My—fiancé." She spoke somewhat coquettishly. "He's very well known, and he's afraid there might

be scandal if I got mixed up in the case as a witness, or anything like that."

"I can readily understand his feelings." Vance nodded sympathetically. "And who, by the bye, is this luckiest of men?"

"Say! You're good." She complimented him with a coy *moue*. "But I'm not announcing my engagement yet."

"Don't be horrid," begged Vance. "You know perfectly well that I could find out his name by making a few inquiries. And if you drove me to learn the facts elsewhere, then my promise to keep your name a secret would no longer bind me."

Miss La Fosse considered this point.

"I guess you could find out, all right . . . so I might as well tell you—only I'm trusting to your word to protect me." She opened her eyes wide and gave Vance a melting look. "I know you wouldn't let me down."

"My dear Miss La Fosse!" His tone was one of pained surprise.

"Well, my fiancé is Mr. Mannix, and he's the head of a big fur-importing house. . . . You see"—she became clingingly confidential—"Louey—that is, Mr. Mannix—used to go round with Margy. That's why he didn't want me to get mixed up in the affair. He said the police might bother him with questions, and his name might get into the papers. And that would hurt his commercial standing."

"I quite understand," murmured Vance. "And do you happen to know where Mr. Mannix was Monday night?"

The girl looked startled.

"Of course I know. He was right here with me from half past ten until two in the morning. We were discussing a new musical show he was interested in; and he wanted me to take the leading rôle."

"I'm sure it will be a success." Vance spoke with disarming friendliness. "Were you home alone all Monday evening?"

"Hardly." The idea seemed to amuse her. "I went to the 'Scandals'—but I came home early. I knew Louey—Mr. Mannix—was coming."

"I trust he appreciated your sacrifice." Vance, I believe, was disappointed by this unexpected alibi of Mannix's. It was, indeed, so final that further interrogation concerning it seemed futile. After a momentary pause, he changed the subject.

"Tell me; what do you know about a Mr. Charles Cleaver? He was a friend of Miss Odell's."

"Oh, Pop's all right." The girl was plainly relieved by this turn in the conversation. "A good scout. He was certainly gone on Margy. Even after she threw him over for Mr. Spotswoode, he was faithful, as you might say—always running after her, sending her flowers and presents. Some men are like that. Poor old Pop! He even phoned me Monday night to call up Margy for him and try to arrange a party.—Maybe if I'd done it, she wouldn't be dead now. . . . It's a funny world, isn't it?"

"Oh, no end funny." Vance smoked calmly for a minute; I could not help admiring his self-control. "What time did Mr. Cleaver phone you Monday night—do you recall?" From his voice one would have thought the question of no importance.

"Let me see. . . ." She pursed her lips prettily. "It was just ten minutes to twelve. I remember that the little chime clock on the mantel over there was striking midnight, and at first I couldn't hear Pop very well. You see, I always keep my clock ten minutes fast so I'll never be late for an appointment."

Vance compared the clock with his watch.

"Yes, it's ten minutes fast.—And what about the party?"

"Oh, I was too busy talking about the new show, and I had to refuse. Anyway, Mr. Mannix didn't want to have a party that night. . . . It wasn't my fault, was it?"

"Not a bit of it," Vance assured her. "Work comes before pleasure—especially work as important as yours. . . . And now, there is one other man I want to ask you about, and then I won't bother you any more.—What was the situation between Miss Odell and Doctor Lindquist?"

Miss La Fosse became genuinely perturbed.

"I was afraid you were going to ask me about him." There was apprehension in her eyes. "I don't know just what to say. He was wildly in love with Margy; and she led him on, too. But she was sorry for it afterward, because he got jealous—like a crazy person. He used to pester the life out of her. And once—do you know!—he threatened to shoot her and then shoot himself. I told Margy to look out for him. But she didn't seem to be afraid. Anyway, I think she was taking awful chances. . . . Oh! Do you think it could have been—do you really think——?"

"And wasn't there any one else," Vance inter-

rupted, "who might have felt the same way?—any one Miss Odell had reason to fear?"

"No." Miss La Fosse shook her head. "Margy didn't know many men intimately. She didn't change often, if you know what I mean. There wasn't anybody else outside of those you've mentioned, except, of course, Mr. Spotswoode. He cut Pop out—several months ago. She went to dinner with him Monday night, too. I wanted her to go to the 'Scandals' with me—that's how I know."

Vance rose and held out his hand.

"You've been very kind. And you have nothing whatever to fear. No one shall ever know of our little visit this morning."

"Who do you think killed Margy?" There was genuine emotion in the girl's voice. "Louey says it was probably some burglar who wanted her jewels."

"I'm too wise to sow discord in this happy ménage by even questioning Mr. Mannix's opinion," said Vance half banteringly. "No one *knows* who's guilty; but the police agree with Mr. Mannix."

For a moment the girl's doubts returned, and she gave Vance a searching look.

"Why are you so interested? You didn't know Margy, did you? She never mentioned you."

Vance laughed.

"My dear child! I only wish I knew why I am so deuced concerned in this affair. 'Pon my word, I can't give you even the sketchiest explanation. . . . No, I never met Miss Odell. But it would offend my sense of proportion if Mr. Skeel were punished and the real culprit went free. Maybe I'm getting sentimental. A sad fate, what?"

"I guess I'm getting soft, too." She nodded her head, still looking Vance squarely in the eyes. "I risked my happy home to tell you what I did, because somehow I believed you. . . . Say, you weren't stringing me, by any chance?"

Vance put his hand on his heart, and became serious.

"My dear Miss La Fosse, when I leave here it will be as though I had never entered. Dismiss me and Mr. Van Dine here from your mind."

Something in his manner banished her misgivings, and she bade us a kittenish farewell.

CHAPTER XVII

CHECKING AN ALIBI

(*Thursday, September 13; afternoon*)

"My sleuthing goes better," exulted Vance, when we were again in the street. "Fair Alys was a veritable mine of information—eh, what? Only, you should have controlled yourself better when she mentioned her beloved's name—really, you should, Van old thing. I saw you jump and heard you heave. Such emotion is most unbecoming in a lawyer."

From a booth in a drug-store near the hotel he telephoned Markham: "I am taking you to lunch. I have numerous confidences I would pour into your ear." A debate ensued, but in the end Vance emerged triumphant; and a moment later a taxicab was driving us down-town.

"Alys is clever—there are brains in that fluffy head," he ruminated. "She's much smarter than Heath; she knew at once that Skeel wasn't guilty. Her characterization of the immaculate Tony was inelegant but how accurate—oh, how accurate! And you noticed, of course, how she trusted me. Touchin', wasn't it? . . . It's a knotty problem, Van. Something's amiss somewhere."

He was silent, smoking, for several blocks.

"Mannix. . . . Curious he should crop up again. And he issued orders to Alys to keep mum. Now,

why? Maybe the reason he gave her was the real one. Who knows?—On the other hand, was he with his *chère amie* from half past ten till early morning? Well, well. Again, who knows? Something queer about that business discussion. . . . Then Cleaver. He called up just ten minutes before midnight—oh, yes, he called up. That wasn't a fairy-tale. But how could he telephone from a speeding car? He couldn't. Maybe he really wanted to have a party with his recalcitrant Canary, don't y' know. But then, why the brummagem alibi? Funk? Maybe. But why the circuitousness?—why didn't he call his lost love direct? Ah, perhaps he did! Some one certainly called her by phone at twenty minutes to twelve. We must look into that, Van. . . . Yes, he may have called her, and then when a man answered—who the deuce was that man, anyway?—he may have appealed to Alys. Quite natural, y' know. Anyway, he wasn't in Boonton.—Poor Markham! How upset he'll be when he finds out! . . . But what really worries me is that story of the doctor. Jealous mania: it squares with Ambroise's character perfectly. He's the kind that does go off his head. I knew his confession of paternalism was a red herring. My word! So the doctor was making threats and flourishing pistols, eh? Bad, bad. I don't like it. With those ears of his, he wouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger. Paranoia—that's it. Delusions of persecution. Probably thought the girl and Pop—or maybe the girl and Spotswoode—were plotting his misery and laughing at him. You can't tell about those chaps. They're deep—and they're dangerous. The canny Alys had him sized up—warned the Canary

against him. . . . Taken by and large, it's a devilish tangle. Anyway, I feel rather bucked. We're moving —oh, undoubtedly we're moving—though in what direction I can't even guess. It's beastly annoyin'."

Markham was waiting for us at the Bankers' Club. He greeted Vance irritably.

"What have you got to tell me that's so damned important?"

"Now, don't get ratty." Vance was beaming. "How's your lode-star, Skeel, behaving?"

"So far he's done everything that's pure and refined except join the Christian Endeavor Society."

"Sunday's coming. Give him time. . . . So you're not happy, Markham dear?"

"Was I dragged away from another engagement to report on my state of mind?"

"No need. Your state of mind's execrable. . . . Cheerio! I've brought you something to think about."

"Damn it! I've got too much to think about now."

"Here, have some brioche." Vance gave the order for lunch without consulting either of us. "And now for my revelations. *Imprimis:* Pop Cleaver wasn't in Boonton last Monday night. He was very much in the midst of our modern Gomorrah, trying to arrange a midnight party."

"Wonderful!" snorted Markham. "I lave in the font of your wisdom. His *alter ego*, I take it, was on the road to Hopatcong. The supernatural leaves me cold."

"You may be as pancosmic as you choose. Cleaver was in New York at midnight Monday, craving excitement."

"What about the summons for speeding?"

"That's for you to explain. But if you'll take my advice you'll send for this Boonton catchpole, and let him have a look at Pop. If he says Cleaver is the man he ticketed, I'll humbly do away with myself."

"Well! That makes it worth trying. I'll have the officer at the Stuyvesant Club this afternoon, and I'll point out Cleaver to him. . . . What other staggering revelations have you in store?"

"Mannix will bear looking into."

Markham put down his knife and fork and leaned back.

"I'm overcome! Such Himalayan sagacity! With that evidence against him, he should be arrested at once. . . . Vance, my dear old friend, are you feeling quite normal? No dizzy spells lately? No shooting pains in the head? Knee-jerks all right?"

"Furthermore, Doctor Lindquist was wildly infatuated with the Canary, and insanely jealous. Recently threatened to take a pistol and hold a little pogrom of his own."

"That's better." Markham sat up. "Where did you get this information?"

"Ah! That's my secret."

Markham was annoyed.

"Why so mysterious?"

"Needs must, old chap. Gave my word, and all that sort of thing. And I'm a bit quixotic, don't y' know—too much Cervantes in my youth." He spoke lightly, but Markham knew him too well to push the question.

In less than five minutes after we had returned to the District Attorney's office Heath came in.

"I got something else on Mannix, sir; thought you might want to add it to the report I turned in yesterday. Burke secured a picture of him, and showed it to the phone operators at Odell's house. Both of 'em recognized it. He's been there several times, but it wasn't the Canary he called on. It was the woman in Apartment 2. She's named Frisbee, and used to be one of Mannix's fur models. He's been to see her several times during the past six months, and has taken her out once or twice; but he hasn't called on her for a month or more. . . . Any good?"

"Can't tell." Markham shot Vance an inquisitive look. "But thanks for the information, Sergeant."

"By the bye," said Vance dulcetly, when Heath had left us, "I'm feeling tophole. No pains in the head; no dizzy spells. Knee-jerks perfect."

"Delighted. Still, I can't charge a man with murder because he calls on his fur model."

"You're so hasty! Why should you charge him with murder?" Vance rose and yawned. "Come, Van. I'd rather like to gaze on Perneb's tomb at the Metropolitan this afternoon. Could you bear it?" At the door he paused. "I say, Markham, what about the Boonton bailiff?"

Markham rang for Swacker.

"I'll see to it at once. Drop in at the club around five, if you feel like it. I'll have the officer there then, as Cleaver is sure to come in before dinner."

When Vance and I returned to the club late that afternoon, Markham was stationed in the lounge-room facing the main door of the rotunda; and beside him sat a tall, heavy-set, bronzed man of about forty, alert but ill at ease.

"Traffic Officer Phipps arrived from Boonton a little while ago," said Markham, by way of introduction. "Cleaver is expected at any moment now. He has an appointment here at half past five."

Vance drew up a chair.

"I do hope he's a punctual beggar."

"So do I," returned Markham viciously. "I'm looking forward to your *felo-de-se*."

"'Our hap is loss, our hope but sad despair,'" murmured Vance.

Less than ten minutes later Cleaver entered the rotunda from the street, paused at the desk, and sauntered into the lounge-room. There was no escaping the observation point Markham had chosen; and as he walked by us he paused and exchanged greetings. Markham detained him a moment with a few casual questions; and then Cleaver passed on.

"That the man you ticketed, officer?" asked Markham, turning to Phipps.

Phipps was scowling perplexedly.

"It looks something like him, sir; there's a kind of resemblance. But it ain't him." He shook his head. "No, sir; it ain't him. The fellow I hung a summons on was stouter than this gent, and wasn't as tall."

"You're positive?"

"Yes, sir—no mistake. The guy I tagged tried to argue with me, and then he tried to slip me a fiver to forget it. I had my headlight on him full."

Phipps was dismissed with a substantial *pourboire*.

"*Væ misero mihi!*" sighed Vance. "My worthless existence is to be prolonged. Sad. But you must try to bear it. . . . I say, Markham, what does Pop Cleaver's brother look like?"

"That's it," nodded Markham. "I've met his brother; he's shorter and stouter. . . . This thing is getting beyond me. I think I'll have it out with Cleaver now."

He started to rise, but Vance forced him back into his seat.

"Don't be impetuous. Cultivate patience. Cleaver's not going to do a bunk; and there are one or two prelimin'ry steps strongly indicated. Mannix and Lindquist still seduce my curiosity."

Markham clung to his point.

"Neither Mannix nor Lindquist is here now, and Cleaver is. And I want to know why he lied to me about that summons."

"I can tell you that," said Vance. "He wanted you to think he was in the wilds of New Jersey at midnight Monday.—Simple, what?"

"The inference is a credit to your intelligence! But I hope you don't seriously think that Cleaver is guilty. It's possible he knows something; but I certainly cannot picture him as a strangler."

"And why?"

"He's not the type. It's inconceivable—even if there were evidence against him."

"Ah! The psychological judgment! You eliminate Cleaver because you don't think his nature harmonizes with the situation. I say, doesn't that come perilously near being an esoteric hypothesis? —or a metaphysical deduction? . . . However, I don't entirely agree with you in your application of the theory to Cleaver. That fish-eyed gambler has unsuspected potentialities for evil. But with the theory itself I am wholly in accord. And behold,

my dear Markham: you yourself apply psychology in its abecedarian implications, yet ridicule my application of it in its higher developments. Consistency may be the hobgoblin of little minds, y' know, but it's none the less a priceless jewel. . . . How about a cup of tea?"

We sought the Palm Room, and sat down at a table near the entrance. Vance ordered oolong tea, but Markham and I took black coffee. A very capable four-piece orchestra was playing Tchaikovsky's *Casse-Noisette* Suite, and we sat restfully in the comfortable chairs without speaking. Markham was tired and dispirited, and Vance was busy with the problem that had absorbed him continuously since Tuesday morning. Never before had I seen him so preoccupied.

We had been there perhaps half an hour when Spotswoode strolled in. He stopped and spoke, and Markham asked him to join us. He, too, appeared depressed, and his eyes showed signs of worry.

"I hardly dare ask you, Mr. Markham," he said diffidently, after he had ordered a ginger ale, "but how do my chances stand now of being called as a witness?"

"That fate is certainly no nearer than when I last saw you," Markham replied. "In fact, nothing has happened to change the situation materially."

"And the man you had under suspicion?"

"He's still under suspicion, but no arrest has been made. We're hoping, however, that something will break before long."

"And I suppose you still want me to remain in the city?"

"If you can arrange it—yes."

Spotswoode was silent for a time; then he said:

"I don't want to appear to shirk any responsibility—and perhaps it may seem wholly selfish for me even to suggest it—but, in any event, wouldn't the testimony of the telephone operator as to the hour of Miss Odell's return and her calls for help be sufficient to establish the facts, without my corroboration?"

"I have thought of that, of course; and if it is at all possible to prepare the case for the prosecution without summoning you to appear, I assure you it will be done. At the moment, I can see no necessity of your being called as a witness. But one never knows what may turn up. If the defense hinges on a question of exact time, and the operator's testimony is questioned or disqualified for any reason, you may be required to come forward. Otherwise not."

Spotswoode sipped his ginger ale. A little of his depression seemed to have departed.

"You're very generous, Mr. Markham. I wish there was some adequate way of thanking you." He looked up hesitantly. "I presume you are still opposed to my visiting the apartment. . . . I know you think me unreasonable and perhaps sentimental; but the girl represented something in my life that I find very difficult to tear out. I don't expect you to understand it—I hardly understand it myself."

"I think it's easily understandable, don't y' know," remarked Vance, with a sympathy I had rarely seen him manifest. "Your attitude needs no apology. History and fable are filled with the same

situation, and the protagonists have always exhibited sentiments similar to yours. Your most famous prototype, of course, was Odysseus on the citron-scented isle of Ogygia with the fascinatin' Calypso. The soft arms of sirens have gone snaking round men's necks ever since the red-haired Lilith worked her devastatin' wiles on the impressionable Adam. We're all sons of that racy old boy."

Spotswoode smiled.

"You at least give me an historic background," he said. Then he turned to Markham. "What will become of Miss Odell's possessions—her furniture and so forth?"

"Sergeant Heath heard from an aunt of hers in Seattle," Markham told him. "She's on her way to New York, I believe, to take over what there is of the estate."

"And everything will be kept intact until then?"

"Probably longer, unless something unexpected happens. Anyway, until then."

"There are one or two little trinkets I'd like to keep," Spotswoode confessed, a bit shamefacedly, I thought.

After a few more minutes of desultory talk he rose, and, pleading an engagement, bade us good afternoon.

"I hope I can keep his name clear of the case," said Markham, when he had gone.

"Yes; his situation is not an enviable one," concurred Vance. "It's always sad to be found out. The moralist would set it down to retribution."

"In this instance chance was certainly on the side of righteousness. If he hadn't chosen Monday night

for the Winter Garden, he might now be in the bosom of his family, with nothing more troublesome to bother him than a guilty conscience."

"It certainly looks that way." Vance glanced at his watch. "And your mention of the Winter Garden reminds me. Do you mind if we dine early? Frivolity beckons me to-night. I'm going to the 'Scandals.'"

We both looked at him as though he had taken leave of his senses.

"Don't be so horrified, my Markham. Why should I not indulge an impulse? . . . And, incidentally, I hope to have glad tidings for you by lunch-time to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAP

(*Friday, September 14; noon*)

Vance slept late the following day. I had accompanied him to the "Scandals" the night before, utterly at a loss to understand his strange desire to attend a type of entertainment which I knew he detested. At noon he ordered his car, and instructed the chauffeur to drive to the Belafield Hotel.

"We are about to call again on the allurin' Alys," he said. "I'd bring posies to lay at her shrine, but I fear dear Mannix might question her unduly about them.

Miss La Fosse received us with an air of crestfallen resentment.

"I might've known it!" She nodded her head with sneering perception. "I suppose you've come to tell me the cops found out about me without the slightest assistance from you." Her disdain was almost magnificent. "Did you bring 'em with you? . . . A swell guy *you* are!—But it's my own fault for being a damn fool."

Vance waited unmoved until she had finished her contemptuous tirade. Then he bowed pleasantly.

"Really, y' know, I merely dropped in to pay my respects, and to tell you that the police have turned in their report of Miss Odell's acquaintances, and

that your name was not mentioned in it. You seemed a little worried yesterday on that score, and it occurred to me I could set your mind wholly at ease."

The vigilance of her attitude relaxed.

"Is that straight? . . . My God! I don't know what would happen if Louey'd find out I'd been blabbing."

"I'm sure he won't find out, unless you choose to tell him. . . . Won't you be generous and ask me to sit down a moment?"

"Of course—I'm so sorry. I'm just having my coffee. Please join me." She rang for two extra services.

Vance had drunk two cups of coffee less than half an hour before, and I marvelled at his enthusiasm for this atrocious hotel beverage.

"I was a belated spectator of the 'Scandals' last night," he remarked in a negligent, conversational tone. "I missed the *revue* earlier in the season.—How is it you yourself were so late in seeing it?"

"I've been so busy," she confided. "I was rehearsing for 'A Pair of Queens'; but the production's been postponed. Louey couldn't get the theatre he wanted."

"Do you like *revues?*" asked Vance. "I should think they'd be more difficult for the principals than the ordin'ry musical comedy."

"They are." Miss La Fosse adopted a professional air. "And they're unsatisfactory. The individual is lost in them. There's no real scope for one's talent. They're breathless, if you know what I mean."

"I should imagine so." Vance bravely sipped his

coffee. "And yet, there were several numbers in the 'Scandals' that you could have done charmingly: they seemed particularly designed for you. I thought of you doing them, and—d' ye know?—the thought rather spoiled my enjoyment of the young lady who appeared in them."

"You flatter me, Mr. Vance. But, really, I have a good voice. I've studied very hard. And I learned dancing with Professor Markoff."

"Indeed!" (I'm sure Vance had never heard the name before, but his exclamation seemed to imply that he regarded Professor Markoff as one of the world's most renowned ballet-masters.) "Then you certainly should have been starred in the 'Scandals.' The young lady I have in mind sang rather indifferently, and her dancing was most inadequate. Moreover, she was many degrees your inferior in personality and attractiveness. . . . Confess: didn't you have just a little desire last Monday night to be singing the 'Chinese Lullaby' song?"

"Oh, I don't know." Miss La Fosse carefully considered the suggestion. "They kept the lights awfully low; and I don't look so well in cerise. But the costumes were adorable, weren't they?"

"On you they certainly would have been adorable. . . . What color are you partial to?"

"I love the orchid shades," she told him enthusiastically; "though I don't look at all bad in turquoise blue. But an artist once told me I should always wear white. He wanted to paint my portrait, but the gentleman I was engaged to then didn't like him."

Vance regarded her appraisingly.

"I think your artist friend was right. And, y' know, the St. Moritz scene in the 'Scandals' would have suited you perfectly. The little brunette who sang the snow song, all in white, was delightful; but really, now, she should have had golden hair. Dusky beauties belong to the southern climes. And she impressed me as lacking the sparkle and vitality of a Swiss resort in midwinter. You could have supplied those qualities admirably."

"Yes; I'd have liked that better than the Chinese number, I think. White fox is my favorite fur, too. But, even so, in a *revue* you're on in one number and off in another. When it's all over, you're forgotten." She sighed unhappily.

Vance set down his cup, and looked at her with whimsically reproachful eyes. After a moment he said:

"My dear, why did you fib to me about the time Mr. Mannix returned to you last Monday night? It wasn't a bit nice of you."

"What do you mean!" Miss La Fosse exclaimed in frightened indignation, drawing herself up into an attitude of withering hauteur.

"You see," explained Vance, "the St. Moritz scene of the 'Scandals' doesn't go on until nearly eleven, and it closes the bill. So you couldn't possibly have seen it and also received Mr. Mannix here at half past ten.—Come. What time did he arrive here Monday night?"

The girl flushed angrily.

"You're pretty slick, aren't you? You shoulda been a cop. . . . Well, what if I didn't get home till after the show? Any crime in that?"

"None whatever," answered Vance mildly. "Only a little breach of good faith in telling me you came home early." He bent forward earnestly. "I'm not here to make you trouble. On the contr'ry, I'd like to protect you from any distress or bother. You see, if the police go nosing round, they may run on to you. But if I'm able to give the District Attorney accurate information about certain things connected with Monday night, there'll be no danger of the police being sent to look for you."

Miss La Fosse's eyes grew suddenly hard and her brow crinkled with determination.

"Listen! I haven't got anything to hide, and neither has Louey. But if Louey asks me to say he's somewhere at half past ten, I'm going to say it—see? That's my idea of friendship. Louey had some good reason to ask it, too, or he wouldn't have done it. However, since you're so smart, and have accused me of playing unfair, I'm going to tell you that he didn't get in till after midnight. But if anybody else asks me about it, I'll see 'em in hell before I tell 'em anything but the half-past-ten story. Get that?"

Vance bowed.

"I get it; and I like you for it."

"But don't go away with the wrong idea," she hurried on, her eyes sparkling with fervor. "Louey may not have got here till after midnight, but if you think he knows anything about Margy's death, you're crazy. He was through with Margy a year ago. Why, he hardly knew she was on earth. And if any fool cop gets the notion in his head that Louey was mixed up in the affair, I'll alibi him—so help me God!—if it's the last thing I do in this world."

"I like you more and more," said Vance; and when she gave him her hand at parting he lifted it to his lips.

As we rode down-town Vance was thoughtful. We were nearly to the Criminal Courts Building before he spoke.

"The primitive Alys rather appeals to me," he said. "She's much too good for the oleaginous Mannix. . . . Women are so shrewd—and so gullible. A woman can read a man with almost magical insight; but, on the other hand, she is inexpressibly blind when it comes to *her* man. Witness sweet Alys's faith in Mannix. He probably told her he was slaving at the office Monday night. Naturally, she doesn't believe it; but she knows—*knows*, mind you—that her Louey just couldn't have been concerned in the Canary's death. Ah, well, let us hope she's right and that Mannix is not apprehended—at least not until her new show is financed. . . . My word! If this being a detective involves many more *revues*, I shall have to resign. Thank Heaven, though, the lady didn't attend the cinema Monday night!"

When we arrived at the District Attorney's office we found Heath and Markham in consultation. Markham had a pad before him, several pages of which were covered with tabulated and annotated entries. A cloud of cigar-smoke enveloped him. Heath sat facing him, his elbows on the table, his chin resting in his hands. He looked pugnacious but disconsolate.

"I'm going over the case with the Sergeant," Markham explained, with a brief glance in our direction. "We're trying to get all the salient points down in some kind of order, to see if there are any connect-

ing links we've overlooked. I've told the Sergeant about the doctor's infatuation and his threats, and of the failure of Traffic Officer Phipps to identify Cleaver. But the more we learn, the worse, apparently, the jumble grows."

He picked up the sheets of paper and fastened them together with a clip.

"The truth is, we haven't any real evidence against anybody. There are suspicious circumstances connected with Skeel and Doctor Lindquist and Cleaver; and our interview with Mannix didn't precisely allay suspicions in his direction, either. But when we come right down to it, what's the situation?—We've got some finger-prints of Skeel, which might have been made late Monday afternoon.—Doctor Lindquist goes berserk when we ask him where he was Monday night, and then offers us a weak alibi. He admits a fatherly interest in the girl, whereas he's really in love with her—a perfectly natural bit of mendacity. —Cleaver lent his car to his brother and lied about it, so that I'd think he was in Boonton Monday at midnight.—And Mannix gives us a number of shifty answers to our questions concerning his relations with the girl. . . . Not an embarrassment of riches."

"I wouldn't say your information was exactly negligent," observed Vance, taking a chair beside the Sergeant. "It may all prove devilish valuable if only it could be put together properly. The difficulty, it appears to me, is that certain parts of the puzzle are missing. Find 'em, and I'll warrant everything will fit beautifully—like a mosaic."

"Easy enough to say 'find 'em,'" grumbled Markham. "The trouble is to know where to look."

Heath relighted his dead cigar and made an impatient gesture.

"You can't get away from Skeel. He's the boy that did it, and, if it wasn't for Abe Rubin, I'd sweat the truth outa him.—And by the way, Mr. Vance, he had his own private key to the Odell apartment, all right." He glanced at Markham hesitantly. "I don't want to look as if I was criticising, sir, but I got a feeling we're wasting time chasing after these gentlemen friends of Odell—Cleaver and Mannix and this here doctor."

"You may be right." Markham seemed inclined to agree with him. "However, I'd like to know why Lindquist acted the way he did."

"Well, that might help some," Heath compromised. "If the doc was so far gone on Odell as to threaten to shoot her, and if he went off his head when you asked him to alibi himself, maybe he could tell us something. Why not throw a little scare into him? His record ain't any too good, anyway."

"An excellent idea," chimed in Vance.

Markham looked up sharply. Then he consulted his appointment book.

"I'm fairly free this afternoon, so suppose you bring him down here, Sergeant. Get a subpœna if you have to—only see that he comes. And make it as soon after lunch as you can." He tapped on the desk irritably. "If I don't do anything else, I'm going to eliminate some of this human flotsam that's cluttering up the case. And Lindquist is as good as any to start with. I'll either develop these various suspicious circumstances into something workable, or I'll root them up. Then we'll see where we stand."

Heath shook hands pessimistically and went out.

"Poor hapless man!" sighed Vance, looking after him. "He giveth way to all the pangs and fury of despair."

"And so would you," snapped Markham, "if the newspapers were butchering you for a political holiday.—By the way, weren't you to be a harbinger of glad tidings this noon, or something of the sort?"

"I believe I did hold out some such hope." Vance sat looking meditatively out of the window for several minutes. "Markham, this fellow Mannix lures me like a magnet. He irks and whirrets me. He infests my slumbers. He's the raven on my bust of Pallas. He plagues me like a banshee."

"Does this jeremiad come under the head of tidings?"

"I sha'n't rest peacefully," pursued Vance, "until I know where Louey the furrier was between eleven o'clock and midnight Monday. He was somewhere he shouldn't have been. And you, Markham, must find out. Please make Mannix the second offensive in your assault upon the flotsam. He'll parley, with the right amount of pressure. Be brutal, old dear; let him think you suspect him of the throttling. Ask him about the fur model—what's her name?—Frisbee——" He stopped short and knit his brows. "My eye—oh, my eye! I wonder. . . . Yes, yes, Markham; you must question him about the fur model. Ask him when he saw her last; and try to look wise and mysterious when you're doing it."

"See here, Vance"—Markham was exasperated—"you've been harping on Mannix for three days. What's keeping your nose to that scent?"

"Intuition—sheer intuition. My psychic temperament, don't y' know."

"I'd believe that if I hadn't known you for fifteen years." Markham inspected him shrewdly; then shrugged his shoulders. "I'll have Mannix on the tapis when I'm through with Lindquist."

CHAPTER XIX

THE DOCTOR EXPLAINS

(Friday, September 14; 2 p. m.)

We lunched in the District Attorney's private sanctum; and at two o'clock Doctor Lindquist was announced. Heath accompanied him, and, from the expression on the Sergeant's face, it was plain he did not at all like his companion.

The doctor, at Markham's request, seated himself facing the District Attorney's desk.

"What is the meaning of this new outrage?" he demanded coldly. "Is it your prerogative to force a citizen to leave his private affairs in order to be bullied?"

"It's my duty to bring murderers to justice," replied Markham, with equal coldness. "And if any citizen considers that giving aid to the authorities is an outrage, that's *his* prerogative. If you have anything to fear by answering my questions, doctor, you are entitled to have your attorney present. Would you care to phone him to come here now and give you legal protection?"

Doctor Lindquist hesitated. "I need no legal protection, sir. Will you be good enough to tell me at once why I was brought here?"

"Certainly; to explain a few points which have been discovered regarding your relationship with Miss Odell, and to elucidate—if you care to—your

reasons for deceiving me, at our last conference, in regard to that relationship."

"You have, I infer, been prying unwarrantably into my private affairs. I had heard that such practices were once common in Russia. . . ."

"If the prying was unwarranted, you can, Doctor Lindquist, easily convince me on that point; and whatever we may have learned concerning you will be instantly forgotten.—It is true, is it not, that your interest in Miss Odell went somewhat beyond mere paternal affection?"

"Are not even a man's sacred sentiments respected by the police of this country?" There was insolent scorn in the doctor's tone.

"Under some conditions, yes; under others, no." Markham controlled his fury admirably. "You need not answer me, of course; but, if you choose to be frank, you may possibly save yourself the humiliation of being questioned publicly by the People's attorney in a court of law."

Doctor Lindquist winced and considered the matter at some length.

"And if I admit that my affection for Miss Odell was other than paternal—what then?"

Markham accepted the question as an affirmation.

"You were intensely jealous of her, were you not, doctor?"

"Jealousy," Doctor Lindquist remarked, with an air of ironic professionalism, "is not an unusual accompaniment to an infatuation. Authorities such as Krafft-Ebing, Moll, Freud, Ferenczi, and Adler, I believe, regard it as an intimate psychological corollary of amatory attraction."

"Most instructive," Markham nodded his head appreciatively. "I am to assume, then, that you were infatuated with—or, let us say, amatorily attracted by—Miss Odell, and that on occasions you exhibited the intimate psychological corollary of jealousy?"

"You may assume what you please. But I fail to understand why my emotions are any of your affair."

"Had your emotions not led you to highly questionable and suspicious acts, I would not be interested in them. But I have it on unimpeachable authority that your emotions so reacted on your better judgment that you threatened to take Miss Odell's life and also your own. And, in view of the fact that the young woman has since been murdered, the law naturally—and reasonably—is curious."

The doctor's normally pale face seemed to turn yellow, and his long splay fingers tightened over the arms of his chair; but otherwise he sat immobile and rigidly dignified, his eyes fixed intently on the District Attorney.

"I trust," added Markham, "you will not augment my suspicions by any attempt at denial."

Vance was watching the man closely. Presently he leaned forward.

"I say, doctor, what method of extermination did you threaten Miss Odell with?"

Doctor Lindquist jerked round, thrusting his head toward Vance. He drew in a long rasping breath, and his whole frame became tense. Blood suffused his cheeks; and there was a twitching of the muscles about his mouth and throat. For a moment I was

afraid he was going to lose his self-control. But after a moment's effort he steadied himself.

"You think perhaps I threatened to strangle her?" His words were vibrant with the intensity of his passionate anger. "And you would like to turn my threat into a noose to hang me?—Paugh!" He paused, and when he spoke again his voice had become calmer. "It is quite true I once inadvisedly attempted to frighten Miss Odell with a threat to kill her and to commit suicide. But if your information is as accurate as you would have me believe, you are aware that I threatened her with a revolver. It is the weapon, I believe, that is conventionally mentioned when making empty threats. I certainly would not have threatened her with thuggee, even had I contemplated so abominable an act."

"True," nodded Vance. "And it's a rather good point, don't y' know."

The doctor was evidently encouraged by Vance's attitude. He again faced Markham and elaborated his confession.

"A threat, I presume you know, is rarely the forerunner of a violent deed. Even a brief study of the human mind would teach you that a threat is *prima facie* evidence of one's innocence. A threat, generally, is made in anger, and acts as its own safety-valve." He shifted his eyes. "I am not a married man; my emotional life has not been stabilized, as it were; and I am constantly coming in close contact with hypersensitive and overwrought people. During a period of abnormal susceptibility I conceived an infatuation for the young woman, an infatuation which she did not reciprocate—certainly not with an

ardor commensurate with my own. I suffered deeply; and she made no effort to mitigate my sufferings. Indeed, I suspected her, more than once, of deliberately and perversely torturing me with other men. At any rate, she took no pains to hide her infidelities from me. I confess that once or twice I was almost distracted. And it was in the hope of frightening her into a more amenable and considerate attitude that I threatened her.—I trust that you are a sufficiently discerning judge of human nature to believe me."

"Leaving that point for a moment," answered Markham non-committally, "will you give me more specific information as to your whereabouts Monday night?"

Again I noted a yellow tinge creep over the man's features, and his body stiffened perceptibly. But when he spoke it was with his habitual suavity.

"I considered that my note to you covered that question satisfactorily. What did I omit?"

"What was the name of the patient on whom you were calling that night?"

"Mrs. Anna Breedon. She is the widow of the late Amos H. Breedon of the Breedon National Bank of Long Branch."

"And you were with her, I believe you stated, from eleven until one?"

"That is correct."

"And was Mrs. Breedon the only witness to your presence at the sanitarium between those hours?"

"I am afraid that is so. You see, after ten o'clock at night I never ring the bell. I let myself in with my own key."

"And I suppose that I may be permitted to question Mrs. Breedon?"

Doctor Lindquist was profoundly regretful.

"Mrs. Breedon is a very ill woman. She suffered a tremendous shock at the time of her husband's death last summer, and has been practically in a semiconscious condition ever since. There are times when I even fear for her reason. The slightest disturbance or excitement might produce very serious results."

He took a newspaper cutting from a gold-edged letter-case and handed it to Markham.

"You will observe that this obituary notice mentions her prostration and confinement in a private sanitarium. I have been her physician for years."

Markham, after glancing at the cutting, handed it back. There was a short silence broken by a question from Vance.

"By the bye, doctor, what is the name of the night nurse at your sanitarium?"

Doctor Lindquist looked up quickly.

"My night nurse? Why—what has she to do with it? She was very busy Monday night. I can't understand. . . . Well, if you want her name I have no objection. It's Finckle—Miss Amelia Finckle."

Vance wrote down the name and, rising, carried the slip of paper to Heath.

"Sergeant, bring Miss Finckle here to-morrow morning at eleven," he said, with a slight lowering of one eyelid.

"I sure will, sir. Good idea." His manner boded no good for Miss Finckle.

A cloud of apprehension spread over Doctor Lindquist's face.

"Forgive me if I say that I am insensible to the sanity of your cavalier methods." His tone betrayed only contempt. "May I hope that for the present your inquisition is ended?"

"I think that will be all, doctor," returned Markham politely. "May I have a taxicab called for you?"

"Your consideration overwhelms me. But my car is below." And Doctor Lindquist haughtily withdrew.

Markham immediately summoned Swacker and sent him for Tracy. The detective came at once, polishing his *pince-nez* and bowing affably. One would have taken him for an actor rather than a detective, but his ability in matters requiring delicate handling was a byword in the department.

"I want you to fetch Mr. Louis Mannix again," Markham told him. "Bring him here at once; I'm waiting to see him."

Tracy bowed genially and, adjusting his glasses, departed on his errand.

"And now," said Markham, fixing Vance with a reproachful look, "I want to know what your idea was in putting Lindquist on his guard about the night nurse. Your brain isn't at par this afternoon. Do you think I didn't have the nurse in mind? And now you've warned him. He'll have until eleven tomorrow morning to coach her in her answers. Really, Vance, I can't conceive of anything better calculated to defeat us in our attempt to substantiate the man's alibi."

"I did put a little fright into him, didn't I?" Vance grinned complacently. "Whenever your an-

tagonist begins talking exaggeratedly about the insanity of your notions, he's already deuced hot under the collar. But, Markham old thing, don't burst into tears over my mental shortcomings. If you and I both thought of the nurse, don't you suppose the wily doctor also thought of her? If this Miss Finckle were the type that could be suborned, he would have enlisted her perjurious services two days ago, and she would have been mentioned, along with the comatose Mrs. Breedon, as a witness to his presence at the sanitarium Monday night. The fact that he avoided all reference to the nurse shows that she's not to be wheedled into swearing falsely. . . . No, Markham. I deliberately put him on his guard. Now he'll have to do something before we question Miss Finckle. And I'm vain enough to think I know what it'll be."

"Let me get this right," put in Heath. "Am I, or am I not, to round up the Finckle woman tomorrow morning?"

"There'll be no need," said Vance. "We are doomed, I fear, not to gaze upon this Florence Nightingale. A meeting between us is about the last thing the doctor would desire."

"That may be true," admitted Markham. "But don't forget that he may have been up to something Monday night wholly unconnected with the murder, that he simply doesn't want known."

"Quite—quite. And yet, nearly every one who knew the Canary seems to have selected Monday night for the indulgence of *sub-rosa* peccadilloes. It's a bit thick, what? Skeel tries to make us believe he was immersed in Khun Khan. Cleaver was—if you

take his word for it—touring the countryside in Jersey's lake district. Lindquist wants us to picture him as comforting the afflicted. And Mannix, I happen to know, has gone to some trouble to build up an alibi in case we get nosey. All of 'em, in fact, were doing something they don't want us to know about. Now, what was it? And why did they, of one accord, select the night of the murder for mysterious affairs which they don't dare mention, even to clear themselves of suspicion? Was there an invasion of efreets in the city that night? Was there a curse on the world, driving men to dark bawdy deeds? Was there Black Magic abroad? I think not."

"I'm laying my money on Skeel," declared Heath stubbornly. "I know a professional job when I see it. And you can't get away from those finger-prints and the Professor's report on the chisel."

Markham was sorely perplexed. His belief in Skeel's guilt had, I knew, been undermined in some measure by Vance's theory that the crime was the carefully premeditated act of a shrewd and educated man. But now he seemed to swing irresolutely back to Heath's point of view.

"I'll admit," he said, "that Lindquist and Cleaver and Mannix don't inspire one with a belief in their innocence. But since they're all tarred with the same stick, the force of suspicion against them is somewhat dispersed. After all, Skeel is the only logical aspirant for the rôle of strangler. He's the only one with a visible motive; and he's the only one against whom there's any evidence."

Vance sighed wearily.

"Yes, yes. Finger-prints—chisel marks. You're

such a trustin' soul, Markham. Skeel's finger-prints are found in the apartment; therefore, Skeel strangled the lady. So beastly simple. Why bother further? A *chose jugée*—an adjudicated case. Send Skeel to the chair, and that's that! . . . It's effective, y' know, but is it art?"

"In your critical enthusiasm you understate our case against Skeel," Markham reminded him testily.

"Oh, I'll grant that your case against him is ingenious. It's so deuced ingenious I just haven't the heart to reject it. But most popular truth is mere ingenuity—that's why it's so wrong-headed. Your theory would appeal strongly to the popular mind. And yet, y' know, Markham, it isn't true."

The practical Heath was unmoved. He sat stolidly, scowling at the table. I doubt if he had even heard the exchange of opinions between Markham and Vance.

"You know, Mr. Markham," he said, like one unconsciously voicing an obscure line of thought, "if we could show how Skeel got in and out of Odell's apartment we'd have a better case against him. I can't figure it out—it's got me stopped. So, I've been thinking we oughta get an architect to go over those rooms. The house is an old-timer—God knows when it was originally built—and there may be some way of getting into it that we haven't discovered yet."

"'Pon my soul!" Vance stared at him in satirical wonderment. "You're becoming downright romantic! Secret passageways—hidden doors—stairways between the walls. So that's it, is it? Oh, my word! . . . Sergeant, beware of the cinema. It has ruined

many a good man. Try grand opera for a while—it's more borin' but less corruptin'."

"That's all right, Mr. Vance." Apparently Heath himself did not relish the architectural idea particularly. "But as long as we don't know how Skeel got in, it's just as well to make sure of a few ways he didn't get in."

"I agree with you, Sergeant," said Markham. "I'll get an architect on the job at once." He rang for Swacker, and gave the necessary instructions.

Vance extended his legs and yawned.

"All we need now is a Favorite of the Harem, a few blackamoors with palm-leaf fans, and some *pizzicato* music."

"You will joke, Mr. Vance." Heath lit a fresh cigar. "But even if the architect don't find anything wrong with the apartment, Skeel's liable to give his hand away 'most any time."

"I'm pinnin' my childish faith on Mannix," said Vance. "I don't know why I should; but he's not a nice man, and he's suppressing something.—Markham, don't you dare let him go until he tells you where he was Monday night. And don't forget to hint mysteriously about the fur model."

CHAPTER XX

A MIDNIGHT WITNESS

(*Friday, September 14; 3.30 p. m.*)

In less than half an hour Mannix arrived. Heath relinquished his seat to the newcomer, and moved to a large chair beneath the windows. Vance had taken a place at the small table on Markham's right where he was able to face Mannix obliquely.

It was patent that Mannix did not relish the idea of another interview. His little eyes shifted quickly about the office, lingered suspiciously for a moment on Heath, and at last came to rest on the District Attorney. He was more vigilant even than during his first visit; and his greeting to Markham, while fulsome, had in it a note of trepidation. Nor was Markham's air calculated to put him at ease. It was an ominous, indomitable Public Prosecutor who motioned him to be seated. Mannix laid his hat and cane on the table, and sat down on the edge of his chair, his back as perpendicular as a flag-pole.

"I'm not at all satisfied with what you told me Wednesday, Mr. Mannix," Markham began, "and I trust you won't necessitate me to take drastic steps to find out what you know about Miss Odell's death."

"What I know!" Mannix forced a smile intended to be disarming. "Mr. Markham—Mr. Markham!"

He seemed oilier than usual as he spread his hands in hopeless appeal. "If I knew anything, believe me, I would tell you—positively I would tell you."

"I'm delighted to hear it. Your willingness makes my task easier. First, then, please tell me where you were at midnight Monday."

Mannix's eyes slowly contracted until they looked like two tiny shining disks, but otherwise the man did not move. After what seemed an interminable pause, he spoke.

"I should tell you where I was Monday? Why should I have to do that? . . . Maybe I'm suspected of the murder—yes?"

"You're not suspected now. But your apparent unwillingness to answer my question is certainly suspicious. Why don't you care to have me know where you were?"

"I got no reason to keep it from you, y' understand." Mannix shrugged. "I got nothing to be ashamed of—absolutely! . . . I had a lot of accounts to go over at the office—winter-season stocks. I was down at the office until ten o'clock—maybe later. Then at half past ten——"

"That'll do!" Vance's voice cut in tartly. "No need to drag any one else into this thing."

He spoke with a curious significance of emphasis, and Mannix studied him craftily, trying to read what knowledge, if any, lay behind his words. But he received no enlightenment from Vance's features. The warning, however, had been enough to halt him.

"You don't want to know where I was at half past ten?"

"Not particularly," said Vance. "We want to

know where you were at midnight. And it won't be necess'ry to mention any one who saw you at that time. When you tell us the truth, we'll know it." He himself had assumed the air of wisdom and mystery that he had deputed to Markham earlier in the afternoon. Without breaking faith with Alys La Fosse, he had sowed the seeds of doubt in Mannix's mind.

Before the man could frame an answer, Vance stood up and leaned impressively over the District Attorney's desk.

"You know a Miss Frisbee. Lives in 71st Street; accurately speaking—at number 184; to be more exact—in the house where Miss Odell lived; to put it precisely—in Apartment Number 2. Miss Frisbee was a former model of yours. Sociable girl: still charitable to the advances of her erstwhile employer —meanin' yourself.—When did you see her last, Mr. Mannix? . . . Take your time about answering. You may want to think it over."

Mannix took his time. It was a full minute before he spoke, and then it was to put another question.

"Haven't I got a right to call on a lady—haven't I?"

"Certainly. Therefore, why should a question about so obviously correct and irreproachable an episode make you uneasy?"

"Me uneasy?" Mannix, with considerable effort, produced a grin. "I'm just wondering what you got in your mind, asking me about my private affairs."

"I'll tell you. Miss Odell was murdered at about midnight Monday. No one came or went through

the front door of the house, and the side door was locked. The only way any one could have entered her apartment was by way of Apartment 2; and nobody who knew Miss Odell ever visited Apartment 2 except yourself."

At these words Mannix leaned over the table, grasping the edge of it with both hands for support. His eyes were wide and his sensual lips hung open. But it was not fear that one read in his attitude; it was sheer amazement. He sat for a moment staring at Vance, stunned and incredulous.

"That's what you think, is it? No one could've got in or out except by Apartment 2, because the side door was locked?" He gave a short vicious laugh. "If that side door didn't happen to be locked Monday night, where'd I stand then—huh? Where'd I stand?"

"I rather think you'd stand with us—with the District Attorney." Vance was watching him like a cat.

"Sure I would!" spat Mannix. "And let me tell you something, my friend: that's just where I stand —absolutely!" He swung heavily about and faced Markham. "I'm a good fellow, y' understand, but I've kept my mouth shut long enough. . . . *That side door wasn't locked Monday night. And I know who sneaked out of it at five minutes to twelve!*"

"*Ça marche!*" murmured Vance, reseating himself and calmly lighting a cigarette.

Markham was too astonished to speak at once; and Heath sat stock-still, his cigar half-way to his mouth.

At length Markham leaned back and folded his arms.

"I think you'd better tell us the whole story, Mr. Mannix." His voice held a quality which made the request an imperative.

Mannix, too, settled back in his chair.

"Oh, I'm going to tell it—believe me, I'm going to tell it.—You had the right idea. I spent the evening with Miss Frisbee. No harm in that, though."

"What time did you go there?"

"After office hours—half past five, quarter to six. Came up in the subway, got off at 72d, and walked over."

"And you entered the house through the front door?"

"No. I walked down the alleyway and went in the side door—like I generally do. It's nobody's business who I call on, and what the telephone operator in the front hall don't know don't hurt him."

"That's all right so far," observed Heath. "The janitor didn't bolt the side door until after six."

"And did you stay the entire evening, Mr. Mannix?" asked Markham.

"Sure—till just before midnight. Miss Frisbee cooked the dinner, and I'd brought along a bottle of wine. Social little party—just the two of us. And I didn't go outside the apartment, understand, until five minutes to twelve. You can get the lady down here and ask her. I'll call her up now and tell her to explain the exact situation about Monday night. I'm not asking you to take my word for it—positively not."

Markham made a gesture dismissing the suggestion.

"What took place at five minutes to twelve?"

Mannix hesitated, as if loath to come to the point.

"I'm a good fellow, y' understand. And a friend's a friend. But—I ask you—is that any reason why I should get in wrong for something I didn't have absolutely nothing to do with?"

He waited for an answer, but receiving none, continued.

"Sure, I'm right.—Anyway, here's what happened. As I said, I was calling on the lady. But I had another date for later that night; so a few minutes before midnight I said good-bye and started to go. Just as I opened the door I saw some one sneaking away from the Canary's apartment down the little back hall to the side door. There was a light in the hall, and the door of Apartment 2 faces that side door. I saw the fellow as plain as I see you—positively as plain."

"Who was it?"

"Well, if you got to know, it was Pop Cleaver."

Markham's head jerked slightly.

"What did you do then?"

"Nothing, Mr. Markham—nothing at all. I didn't think much about it, y' understand. I knew Pop was chasing after the Canary, and I just supposed he'd been calling on her. But I didn't want Pop to see me—none of his business where I spend my time. So I waited quietly till he went out——"

"By the side door?"

"Sure.—Then I went out the same way. I was going to leave by the front door, because I knew the side door was always locked at night. But when I saw Pop go out that way, I said to myself I'd do the same. No sense giving your business away to a tele-

phone operator if you haven't got to—no sense at all. So I went out the same way I came in. Picked up a taxi on Broadway, and went——"

"That's enough!" Again Vance's command cut him short.

"Oh, all right—all right." Mannix seemed content to end his statement at this point. "Only, y' understand, I don't want you to think——"

"We don't."

Markham was puzzled at these interruptions, but made no comment.

"When you read of Miss Odell's death," he said, "why didn't you come to the police with this highly important information?"

"I should get mixed up in it!" exclaimed Mannix in surprise. "I got enough trouble without looking for it—plenty."

"An exigent course," commented Markham with open disgust. "But you nevertheless suggested to me, after you knew of the murder, that Cleaver was being blackmailed by Miss Odell."

"Sure I did. Don't that go to show I wanted to do the right thing by you—giving you a valuable tip?"

"Did you see any one else that night in the halls or alleyway?"

"Nobody—absolutely nobody."

"Did you hear any one in the Odell apartment—any one speaking or moving about, perhaps?"

"Didn't hear a thing." Mannix shook his head emphatically.

"And you're certain of the time you saw Cleaver go out—five minutes to twelve?"

"Positively. I looked at my watch, and I said to the lady: 'I'm leaving the same day I came; it won't be to-morrow for five minutes yet.'"

Markham went over his story point by point, attempting by various means to make him admit more than he had already told. But Mannix neither added to his statement nor modified it in any detail; and after half an hour's cross-examination he was permitted to go.

"We've found one missing piece of the puzzle, at any rate," commented Vance. "I don't see now just how it fits into the complete pattern, but it's helpful and suggestive. And, I say, how beautifully my intuition about Mannix was verified, don't y' know!"

"Yes, of course—your precious intuition." Markham looked at him sceptically. "Why did you shut him up twice when he was trying to tell me something?"

"*O, tu ne sauras jamais*," recited Vance. "I simply can't tell you, old dear. Awfully sorry, and all that."

His manner was whimsical, but Markham knew that at such times Vance was at heart most serious, and he did not press the question. I could not help wondering if Miss La Fosse realized just how secure she had been in putting her faith in Vance's integrity.

Heath had been considerably shaken by Mannix's story.

"I don't savvy that side door being unlocked," he complained. "How the hell did it get bolted again on the inside after Mannix went out? And who unbolted it after six o'clock?"

"In God's good time, my Sergeant, all things will be revealed," said Vance.

"Maybe—and maybe not. But if we do find out, you can take it from me that the answer'll be Skeel. He's the bird we gotta get the goods on. Cleaver is no expert jimmy artist; and neither is Mannix."

"Just the same, there was a very capable technician on hand that night, and it wasn't your friend the Dude—though he was probably the Donatello who sculptured open the jewel-case."

"A pair of 'em, was there? That's your theory, is it, Mr. Vance? You said that once before; and I'm not saying you're wrong. But if we can hang any part of it on Skeel, we'll make him come across as to who his pal was."

"It wasn't a pal, Sergeant. It was more likely a stranger."

Markham sat glowering into space.

"I don't at all like the Cleaver end of this affair," he said. "There's been something damned wrong about him ever since Monday."

"And I say," put in Vance, "doesn't the gentleman's false alibi take on a certain shady significance now, what? You apprehend, I trust, why I restrained you from questioning him about it at the club yesterday. I rather fancied that if you could get Mannix to pour out his heart to you, you'd be in a stronger position to draw a few admissions from Cleaver. And behold! Again the triumph of intuition! With what you now know about him, you can chivvy him most unconscionably—eh, what?"

"And that's precisely what I'm going to do." Markham rang for Swacker. "Get hold of Charles Cleaver," he ordered irritably. "Phone him at the Stuyvesant Club and also his home—he lives round

the corner from the club in West 27th Street. And tell him I want him to be here in half an hour, or I'll send a couple of detectives to bring him in handcuffs."

For five minutes Markham stood before the window, smoking agitatedly, while Vance, with a smile of amusement, busied himself with *The Wall Street Journal.* Heath got himself a drink of water, and took a turn up and down the room. Presently Swacker re-entered.

"Sorry, Chief, but there's nothing doing. Cleaver's gone into the country somewhere. Won't be back till late to-night."

"Hell! . . . All right—that'll do." Markham turned to Heath. "You have Cleaver rounded up to-night, Sergeant, and bring him in here to-morrow morning at nine."

"He'll be here, sir!" Heath paused in his pacing and faced Markham. "I've been thinking, sir; and there's one thing that keeps coming up in my mind, so to speak. You remember that black document-box that was setting on the living-room table? It was empty; and what a woman generally keeps in that kind of a box is letters and things like that. Well, now, here's what's been bothering me: that box wasn't jimmied open—it was unlocked with a key. And, anyway, a professional crook don't take letters and documents. . . . You see what I mean, sir?"

"Sergeant of mine!" exclaimed Vance. "I abase myself before you! I sit at your feet! . . . The document-box—the tidily opened, empty document-box! Of course! Skeel didn't open it—never in this world! That was the other chap's handiwork."

"What was in your mind about that box, Sergeant?" asked Markham.

"Just this, sir. As Mr. Vance has insisted right along, there mighta been some one besides Skeel in that apartment during the night. And you told me that Cleaver admitted to you he'd paid Odell a lot of money last June to get back his letters. But suppose he never paid that money; suppose he went there Monday night and took those letters. Wouldn't he have told you just the story he did about buying 'em back? Maybe that's how Mannix happened to see him there."

"That's not unreasonable," Markham acknowledged. "But where does it lead us?"

"Well, sir, if Cleaver did take 'em Monday night, he mighta held on to 'em. And if any of those letters were dated later than last June, when he says he bought 'em back, then we'd have the goods on him."

"Well?"

"As I say, sir, I've been thinking. . . . Now, Cleaver is outa town to-day; and if we could get hold of those letters. . . ."

"It might prove helpful, of course," said Markham coolly, looking the Sergeant straight in the eye. "But such a thing is quite out of the question."

"Still and all," mumbled Heath, "Cleaver's been pulling a lot of raw stuff on you, sir."

CHAPTER XXI

A CONTRADICTION IN DATES

(Saturday, September 15; 9 a. m.)

The next morning Markham and Vance and I breakfasted together at the Prince George, and arrived at the District Attorney's office a few minutes past nine. Heath, with Cleaver in tow, was waiting in the reception-room.

To judge by Cleaver's manner as he entered, the Sergeant had been none too considerate of him. He strode belligerently to the District Attorney's desk and fixed a cold, resentful eye on Markham.

"Am I, by any chance, under arrest?" he demanded softly, but it was the rasping, suppressed softness of wrathful indignation.

"Not yet," said Markham curtly. "But if you were, you'd have only yourself to blame.—Sit down."

Cleaver hesitated, and took the nearest chair.

"Why was I routed out of bed at seven-thirty by this detective of yours"—he jerked his thumb toward Heath—"and threatened with patrol-wagons and warrants because I objected to such high-handed and illegal methods?"

"You were merely threatened with legal procedure if you refused to accept my invitation voluntarily. This is my short day at the office; and there was some explaining I wanted from you without delay."

"I'm damned if I'll explain anything to you under these conditions!" For all his nerveless poise, Cleaver was finding it difficult to control himself. "I'm no pickpocket that you can drag in here when it suits your convenience and put through a third degree."

"That's eminently satisfactory to me." Markham spoke ominously. "But since you refuse to do your explaining as a free citizen, I have no other course than to alter your present status." He turned to Heath. "Sergeant, go across the hall and have Ben swear out a warrant for Charles Cleaver. Then lock this gentleman up."

Cleaver gave a start, and caught his breath sibilantly.

"On what charge?" he demanded.

"The murder of Margaret Odell."

The man sprang to his feet. The color had gone from his face, and the muscles of his jowls worked spasmodically.

"Wait! You're giving me a raw deal. And you'll lose out, too. You couldn't make that charge stick in a thousand years."

"Maybe not. But if you don't want to talk here, I'll make you talk in court."

"I'll talk here." Cleaver sat down again. "What do you want to know?"

Markham took out a cigar and lit it with deliberation.

"First: why did you tell me you were in Boonton Monday night?"

Cleaver apparently had expected the question.

"When I read of the Canary's death I wanted an

alibi; and my brother had just given me the summons he'd been handed in Boonton It was a ready-made alibi right in my hand. So I used it."

"Why did you need an alibi?"

"I didn't need it; but I thought it might save me trouble. People knew I'd been running round with the Odell girl; and some of them knew she'd been blackmailing me—I'd told 'em, like a damn fool. I told Mannix, for instance. We'd both been stung."

"Is that your only reason for concocting this alibi?" Markham was watching him sharply.

"Wasn't it reason enough? Blackmail would have constituted a motive, wouldn't it?"

"It takes more than a motive to arouse unpleasant suspicion."

"Maybe so. Only I didn't want to be drawn into it.—You can't blame me for trying to keep clear of it."

Markham leaned over with a threatening smile.

"The fact that Miss Odell had blackmailed you wasn't your only reason for lying about the summons. It wasn't even your main reason."

Cleaver's eyes narrowed, but otherwise he was like a graven image.

"You evidently know more about it than I do." He managed to make his words sound casual.

"Not more, Mr. Cleaver," Markham corrected him, "but nearly as much.—Where were you between eleven o'clock and midnight Monday?"

"Perhaps that's one of the things you know."

"You're right.—You were in Miss Odell's apartment."

Cleaver sneered, but he did not succeed in dis-

guising the shock that Markham's accusation caused him.

"If that's what you think, then it happens you don't know, after all. I haven't put foot in her apartment for two weeks."

"I have the testimony of reliable witnesses to the contrary.'

"Witnesses!" The word seemed to force itself from Cleaver's compressed lips.

Markham nodded. "You were seen coming out of Miss Odell's apartment and leaving the house by the side door at five minutes to twelve on Monday night."

Cleaver's jaw sagged slightly, and his labored breathing was quite audible.

"And between half past eleven and twelve o'clock," pursued Markham's relentless voice, "Miss Odell was strangled and robbed.—What do you say to that?"

For a long time there was tense silence. Then Cleaver spoke.

"I've got to think this thing out."

Markham waited patiently. After several minutes Cleaver drew himself together and squared his shoulders.

"I'm going to tell you what I did that night, and you can take it or leave it." Again he was the cold, self-contained gambler. "I don't care how many witnesses you've got; it's the only story you'll ever get out of me. I should have told you in the first place, but I didn't see any sense of stepping into hot water if I wasn't pushed in. You might have believed me last Tuesday, but now you've got something in your head, and you want to make an arrest to shut up the newspapers——"

"Tell your story," ordered Markham. "If it's straight, you needn't worry about the newspapers."

Cleaver knew in his heart that this was true. No one—not even his bitterest political enemies—had ever accused Markham of buying *kudos* with any act of injustice, however small.

"There's not much to tell, as a matter of fact," the man began. "I went to Miss Odell's house a little before midnight, but I didn't enter her apartment; I didn't even ring her bell."

"Is that your customary way of paying visits?"

"Sounds fishy, doesn't it? But it's the truth, nevertheless. I intended to see her—that is, I wanted to—but when I reached her door, something made me change my mind——"

"Just a moment.—How did you enter the house?"

"By the side door—the one off the alleyway. I always used it when it was open. Miss Odell requested me to, so that the telephone operator wouldn't see me coming in so often."

"And the door was unlocked at that time Monday night?"

"How else could I have got in by it? A key wouldn't have done me any good, even if I'd had one, for the door locks by a bolt on the inside. I'll say this, though: that's the first time I ever remember finding the door unlocked at night."

"All right. You went in the side entrance. Then what?"

"I walked down the rear hall and listened at the door of Miss Odell's apartment for a minute. I thought there might be some one else with her, and I didn't want to ring unless she was alone. . . ."

"Pardon my interrupting, Mr. Cleaver," interposed Vance. "But what made you think some one else was there?"

The man hesitated.

"Was it," prompted Vance, "because you had telephoned to Miss Odell a little while before, and had been answered by a man's voice?"

Cleaver nodded slowly. "I can't see any particular point in denying it. . . . Yes, that's the reason."

"What did this man say to you?"

"Damn little. He said 'Hello,' and when I asked to speak to Miss Odell, he informed me she wasn't in, and hung up."

Vance addressed himself to Markham.

"That, I think, explains Jessup's report of the brief phone call to the Odell apartment at twenty minutes to twelve."

"Probably." Markham spoke without interest. He was intent on Cleaver's account of what happened later, and he took up the interrogation at the point where Vance had interrupted.

"You say you listened at the apartment door. What caused you to refrain from ringing?"

"I heard a man's voice inside."

Markham straightened up.

"A man's voice? You're sure?"

"That's what I said." Cleaver was matter of fact about it. "A man's voice. Otherwise I'd have rung the bell."

"Could you identify the voice?"

"Hardly. It was very indistinct; and it sounded a little hoarse. It wasn't any one's voice I was familiar with; but I'd be inclined to say it was the same one that answered me over the phone."

"Could you make out anything that was said?"

Cleaver frowned and looked past Markham through the open window.

"I know what the words sounded like," he said slowly. "I didn't think anything of them at the time. But after reading the papers the next day, those words came back to me——"

"What were the words?" Markham cut in impatiently.

"Well, as near as I could make out, they were: 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God!'—repeated two or three times."

This statement seemed to bring a sense of horror into the dreary old office—a horror all the more potent because of the casual, phlegmatic way in which Cleaver repeated that cry of anguish. After a brief pause Markham asked:

"When you heard this man's voice, what did you do?"

"I walked softly back down the rear hall and went out again through the side door. Then I went home."

A short silence ensued. Cleaver's testimony had been in the nature of a surprise; but it fitted perfectly with Mannix's statement.

Presently Vance lifted himself out of the depths of his chair.

"I say, Mr. Cleaver, what were you doing between twenty minutes to twelve—when you phoned Miss Odell—and five minutes to twelve—when you entered the side door of her apartment-house?"

"I was riding up-town in the Subway from 23d Street," came the answer after a short pause.

"Strange—very strange." Vance inspected the

tip of his cigarette. "You couldn't possibly have phoned any one during that fifteen minutes?"

I suddenly remembered Alys La Fosse's statement that Cleaver had telephoned to her on Monday night at ten minutes to twelve. Vance, by his question, had, without revealing his own knowledge, created a state of uncertainty in the other's mind. Afraid to commit himself too emphatically, Cleaver resorted to an evasion.

"It's possible, is it not, that I could have phoned some one after leaving the Subway at 72d Street and before I walked the block to Miss Odell's house?"

"Oh, quite," murmured Vance. "Still, looking at it mathematically, if you phoned Miss Odell at twenty minutes to twelve, and then entered the Subway, rode to 72d Street, walked a block to 71st, went into the building, listened at her door, and departed at five minutes to twelve—making the total time consumed only fifteen minutes—you'd scarcely have sufficient leeway to stop en route and phone to any one. However, I sha'n't press the point. But I'd really like to know what you did between eleven o'clock and twenty minutes to twelve, when you phoned to Miss Odell."

"To tell you the truth, I was upset that night. I knew Miss Odell was out with another man—she'd broken an appointment with me—and I walked the streets for an hour or more, fuming and fretting."

"Walked the streets?" Vance frowned.

"So I said." Cleaver spoke with animus.

Then, turning, he gave Markham a long calculating look. "You remember I once suggested to you that you might learn something from a Doctor Lindquist. . . . Did you ever get after him?"

Before Markham could answer, Vance broke in.

"Ah! That's it!—Doctor Lindquist! Well, well—of course! . . . So, Mr. Cleaver, you were walking the streets? The *streets*, mind you! Precisely!—You state the fact, and I echo the word 'streets.' And you—apparently out of a clear sky—ask about Doctor Lindquist. Why Doctor Lindquist? No one has mentioned him. But that word 'streets'—that's the connection. The streets and Doctor Lindquist are one—same as Paris and springtime are one. Neat, very neat. . . . And now I've got another piece to the puzzle."

Markham and Heath looked at him as if he had suddenly gone mad. He calmly selected a *Régie* from his case and proceeded to light it. Then he smiled beguilingly at Cleaver.

"The time has come, my dear sir, for you to tell us when and where you met Doctor Lindquist while roaming the streets Monday night. If you don't, 'pon my word, I'll come pretty close to doing it for you."

A full minute passed before Cleaver spoke; and during that time his cold staring eyes never moved from the District Attorney's face.

"I've already told most of the story; so here's the rest." He gave a soft mirthless laugh. "I went to Miss Odell's house a little before half past eleven—thought she might be home by that time. There I ran into Doctor Lindquist standing in the entrance to the alleyway. He spoke to me, and told me some

one was with Miss Odell in her apartment. Then I walked round the corner to the Ansonia Hotel. After ten minutes or so I telephoned Miss Odell, and, as I said, a man answered. I waited another ten minutes and phoned a friend of Miss Odell's, hoping to arrange a party; but failing, I walked back to the house. The doctor had disappeared, and I went down the alleyway and in the side door. After listening a minute, as I told you, and hearing a man's voice, I came away and went home. . . . That's everything."

At that moment Swacker came in and whispered something to Heath. The Sergeant rose with alacrity and followed the secretary out of the room. Almost at once he returned, bearing a bulging Manila folder. Handing it to Markham, he said something in a low voice inaudible to the rest of us. Markham appeared both astonished and displeased. Waving the Sergeant back to his seat, he turned to Cleaver.

"I'll have to ask you to wait in the reception-room for a few minutes. Another urgent matter has just arisen."

Cleaver went out without a word, and Markham opened the folder.

"I don't like this sort of thing, Sergeant. I told you so yesterday when you suggested it."

"I understand, sir." Heath, I felt, was not as contrite as his tone indicated. "But if those letters and things are all right, and Cleaver hasn't been lying to us about 'em, I'll have my man put 'em back so's no one'll ever know they were taken. And if they do make Cleaver out a liar, then we've got a good excuse for grabbing 'em."

Markham did not argue the point. With a gesture of distaste he began running through the letters, looking particularly at the dates. Two photographs he put back after a cursory glance; and one piece of paper, which appeared to contain a pen-and-ink sketch of some kind, he tore up with disgust and threw into the waste-basket. Three letters, I noticed, he placed to one side. After five minutes' inspection of the others, he returned them to the folder. Then he nodded to Heath.

"Bring Cleaver back." He rose and, turning, gazed out of the window.

As soon as Cleaver was again seated before the desk Markham said, without looking round:

"You told me it was last June that you bought your letters back from Miss Odell. Do you recall the date?"

"Not exactly," said Cleaver easily. "It was early in the month, though—during the first week, I think."

Markham now spun about and pointed to the three letters he had segregated.

"How, then, do you happen to have in your possession compromising letters which you wrote to Miss Odell from the Adirondacks late in July?"

Cleaver's self-control was perfect. After a moment's stoical silence, he merely said in a mild, quiet voice:

"You of course came by those letters legally."

Markham was stung, but he was also exasperated by the other's persistent deceptions.

"I regret to confess," he said, "that they were taken from your apartment—though, I assure you,

it was against my instructions. But since they have come unexpectedly into my possession, the wisest thing you can do is to explain them. There was an empty document-box in Miss Odell's apartment the morning her body was found, and, from all appearances, it had been opened Monday night."

"I see." Cleaver laughed harshly. "Very well. The fact is—though I frankly don't expect you to believe me—I didn't pay my blackmail to Miss Odell until the middle of August, about three weeks ago. That's when all my letters were returned. I told you it was June in order to set back the date as far as possible. The older the affair was, I figured, the less likelihood there'd be of your suspecting me."

Markham stood fingering the letters undecidedly. It was Vance who put an end to his irresolution.

"I rather think, don't y' know," he said, "that you'd be safe in accepting Mr. Cleaver's explanation and returning his *billets-doux*."

Markham, after a momentary hesitation, picked up the Manila folder and, replacing the three letters, handed it to Cleaver.

"I wish you to understand that I did not sanction the appropriating of this correspondence. You'd better take it home and destroy it.—I won't detain you any longer now. But please arrange to remain where I can reach you if necessary."

"I'm not going to run away," said Cleaver; and Heath directed him to the elevator.

CHAPTER XXII

A TELEPHONE CALL

(Saturday, September 15; 10 a. m.)

Heath returned to the office, shaking his head hopelessly.

"There musta been a regular wake at Odell's Monday night."

"Quite," agreed Vance. "A midnight conclave of the lady's admirers. Mannix was there, unquestionably; and he saw Cleaver; and Cleaver saw Lindquist; and Lindquist saw Spotswoode——"

"Humph! But nobody saw Skeel."

"The trouble is," said Markham, "we don't know how much of Cleaver's story is true.—And, by the way, Vance, do you believe he really bought his letters back in August?"

"If only we knew! Dashed confusin', ain't it?"

"Anyway," argued Heath, "Cleaver's statement about phoning Odell at twenty minutes to twelve, and a man answering, is verified by Jessup's testimony. And I guess Cleaver saw Lindquist all right that night, for it was him who first tipped us off about the doc. He took a chance doing it, because the doc was liable to tell us he saw Cleaver."

"But if Cleaver had an allurin' alibi," said Vance, "he could simply have said the doctor was lying. However, whether you accept Cleaver's absorbin'

legend or not, you can take my word for it there was a visitor, other than Skeel, in the Odell apartment that night."

"That's all right, too," conceded Heath reluctantly. "But, even so, this other fellow is only valuable to us as a possible source of evidence against Skeel."

"That may be true, Sergeant." Markham frowned perplexedly. "Only, I'd like to know how that side door was unbolted and then rebolted on the inside. We know now that it was open around midnight, and that Mannix and Cleaver both used it."

"You worry so over trifles," said Vance negligently. "The door problem will solve itself once we discover who was keeping company with Skeel in the Canary's gilded cage."

"I should say it boils down to Mannix, Cleaver, and Lindquist. They were the only three at all likely to be present; and if we accept Cleaver's story in its essentials, each of them had an opportunity of getting into the apartment between half past eleven and midnight."

"True. But you have only Cleaver's word that Lindquist was in the neighborhood. And that evidence, uncorroborated, can't be accepted as the lily-white truth."

Heath stirred suddenly and looked at the clock.

"Say, what about that nurse you wanted at eleven o'clock?"

"I've been worrying horribly about her for an hour." Vance appeared actually troubled. "Really, y' know, I haven't the slightest desire to meet the lady. I'm hoping for a revelation, don't y' know.

Let's wait for the doctor until half past ten, Sergeant."

He had scarcely finished speaking when Swacker informed Markham that Doctor Lindquist had arrived on a mission of great urgency. It was an amusing situation. Markham laughed outright, while Heath stared at Vance with uncomprehending astonishment.

"It's not necromancy, Sergeant," smiled Vance. "The doctor realized yesterday that we were about to catch him in a falsehood; so he decided to forestall us by explaining personally. Simple, what?"

"Sure." Heath's look of wonderment disappeared.

As Doctor Lindquist entered the room I noted that his habitual urbanity had deserted him. His air was at once apologetic and apprehensive. That he was laboring under some great strain was evident.

"I've come, sir," he announced, taking the chair Markham indicated, "to tell you the truth about Monday night."

"The truth is always welcome, doctor," said Markham encouragingly.

Doctor Lindquist bowed agreement.

"I deeply regret that I did not follow that course at our first interview. But at that time I had not weighed the matter sufficiently; and, having once committed myself to a false statement, I felt I had no option but to abide by it. However, after more mature consideration, I have come to the conclusion that frankness is the wiser course.—The fact is, sir, I was not with Mrs. Breedon Monday night between the hours I mentioned. I remained at home until about half past ten. Then I went to Miss

Odell's house, arriving a little before eleven. I stood outside in the street until half past eleven; then I returned home."

"Such a bare statement needs considerable amplification."

"I realize it, sir; and I am prepared to amplify it." Doctor Lindquist hesitated, and a strained look came into his white face. His hands were tightly clinched. "I had learned that Miss Odell was going to dinner and the theatre with a man named Spotswoode; and the thought of it began to prey on my mind. It was Spotswoode to whom I owed the alienation of Miss Odell's affections; and it was his interference that had driven me to my threat against the young woman. As I sat at home that night, letting my mind dwell morbidly on the situation, I was seized by the impulse to carry out that threat. Why not, I asked myself, end the intolerable situation at once? And why not include Spotswoode in the débâcle? . . ."

As he talked he became more and more agitated. The nerves about his eyes had begun to twitch, and his shoulders jerked like those of a man attempting vainly to control a chill.

"Remember, sir, I was suffering agonies, and my hatred of Spotswoode seemed to cloud my reason. Scarcely realizing what I was doing, and yet operating under an irresistible determination, I put my automatic in my pocket and hurried out of the house. I thought Miss Odell and Spotswoode would be returning from the theatre soon, and I intended to force my way into the apartment and perform the act I had planned. . . . From across the street I saw them enter the house—it was about eleven then

—but, when I came face to face with the actuality, I hesitated. I delayed my revenge; I—I played with the idea, getting a kind of insane satisfaction out of it—knowing they were now at my mercy. . . ."

His hands were shaking as with a coarse tremor; and the twitching about his eyes had increased.

"For half an hour I waited, gloating. Then, as I was about to go in and have it over with, a man named Cleaver came along and saw me. He stopped and spoke. I thought he might be going to call on Miss Odell, so I told him she already had a visitor. He then went on toward Broadway, and while I was waiting for him to turn the corner, Spotswoode came out of the house and jumped into a taxicab that had just driven up. . . . My plan had been thwarted—I had waited too long. Suddenly I seemed to awake as from some terrible nightmare. I was almost in a state of collapse, but I managed to get home. . . . That's what happened—so help me God!"

He sank back weakly in his chair. The suppressed nervous excitement that had fired him while he spoke had died out, and he appeared listless and indifferent. He sat several minutes breathing stertorously, and twice he passed his hand vaguely across his forehead. He was in no condition to be questioned, and finally Markham sent for Tracy and gave orders that he was to be taken to his home.

"Temporary exhaustion from hysteria," commented Vance indifferently. "All these paranoia lads are hyperneurasthenic. He'll be in a psychopathic ward in another year."

"That's as may be, Mr. Vance," said Heath, with an impatience that repudiated all enthusiasm for the

subject of abnormal psychology. "What interests me just now is the way all these fellows' stories hang together."

"Yes," nodded Markham. "There is undeniably a groundwork of truth in their statements."

"But please observe," Vance pointed out, "that their stories do not eliminate any one of them as a possible culprit. Their tales, as you say, synchronize perfectly; and yet, despite all that neat co-ordination, any one of the three could have got into the Odell apartment that night. For instance: Mannix could have entered from Apartment 2 before Cleaver came along and listened; and he could have seen Cleaver going away when he himself was leaving the Odell apartment.—Cleaver could have spoken to the doctor at half past eleven, walked to the Ansonia, returned a little before twelve, gone into the lady's apartment, and come out just as Mannix opened Miss Frisbee's door.—Again, the excitable doctor may have gone in after Spotswoode came out at half past eleven, stayed twenty minutes or so, and departed before Cleaver returned from the Ansonia. . . . No; the fact that their stories dovetail doesn't in the least tend to exculpate any one of them."

"And," supplemented Markham, "that cry of 'Oh, my God!' might have been made by either Mannix or Lindquist—provided Cleaver really heard it."

"He heard it unquestionably," said Vance. "Some one in the apartment was invoking the Deity around midnight. Cleaver hasn't sufficient sense of the dramatic to fabricate such a thrillin' *bonne-bouche*."

"But if Cleaver actually heard that voice," pro-

tested Markham, "then he is automatically eliminated as a suspect."

"Not at all, old dear. He may have heard it after he had come out of the apartment, and realized then, for the first time, that some one had been hidden in the place during his visit."

"Your man in the clothes-closet, I presume you mean."

"Yes—of course. . . . You know, Markham, it might have been the horrified Skeel, emerging from his hiding-place upon a scene of tragic wreckage, who let out that evangelical invocation."

"Except," commented Markham, with sarcasm, "Skeel doesn't impress me as particularly religious."

"Oh, that?" Vance shrugged. "A point in substantiation. Irreligious persons call on God much more than Christians. The only true and consistent theologians, don't y' know, are the atheists."

Heath, who had been sitting in gloomy meditation, took his cigar from his mouth and heaved a heavy sigh.

"Yes," he rumbled, "I'm willing to admit somebody besides Skeel got into Odell's apartment, and that the Dude hid in the clothes-closet. But, if that's so, then this other fellow didn't see Skeel; and it's not going to do us a whole lot of good even if we identify him."

"Don't fret on that point, Sergeant," Vance counselled him cheerfully. "When you've identified this other mysterious visitor you'll be positively amazed how black care will desert you. You'll rubricate the hour you find him. You'll leap gladsomely in the air. You'll sing a roundelay."

"The hell I will!" said Heath.

Swacker came in with a typewritten memorandum, and put it on the District Attorney's desk.

"The architect just phoned in this report."

Markham glanced it over: it was very brief.

"No help here," he said. "Walls solid. No waste space. No hidden entrances."

"Too bad, Sergeant," sighed Vance. "You'll have to drop the cinema idea. . . . Sad."

Heath grunted and looked disconsolate.

"Even without no other way of getting in or out except that side door," he said to Markham, "couldn't we get an indictment against Skeel, now that we know the door was unlocked Monday night?"

"We might, Sergeant. But our chief snag would be to show how it was originally unlocked and then rebolted after Skeel left. And Abe Rubin would concentrate on that point.—No, we'd better wait a while and see what develops."

Something "developed" at once. Swacker entered and informed the Sergeant that Snitkin wanted to see him immediately.

Snitkin came in, visibly agitated, accompanied by a wizened, shabbily dressed little man of about sixty, who appeared awed and terrified. In the detective's hand was a small parcel wrapped in newspaper, which he laid on the District Attorney's desk with an air of triumph.

"The Canary's jewellery," he announced. "I've checked it up from the list the maid gave me, and it's all there."

Heath sprang forward, but Markham was already

untying the package with nervous fingers. When the paper had been opened, there lay before us a small heap of dazzling trinkets—several rings of exquisite workmanship, three magnificent bracelets, a sparkling sunburst, and a delicately wrought lorgnette. The stones were all large and of unconventional cut.

Markham looked up from them inquisitively, and Snitkin, not waiting for the inevitable question, explained.

"This man Potts found 'em. He's a street-cleaner, and he says they were in one of the D. S. C. cans at 23d Street near the Flatiron Building. He found 'em yesterday afternoon, so he says, and took 'em home. Then he got scared and brought 'em to Police Headquarters this morning."

Mr. Potts, the "white-wing," was trembling visibly.

"Thass right, sir—thass right," he assured Markham, with frightened eagerness. "I allus look into any bundles I find. I didn't mean no harm takin' 'em home, sir. I wasn't gonna keep 'em. I laid awake worryin' all night, an' this mornin', as soon as I got a chance, I took 'em to the p'lice." He shook so violently I was afraid he was going to break down completely.

"That's all right, Potts," Markham told him in a kindly voice. Then to Snitkin: "Let the man go—only get his full name and address."

Vance had been studying the newspaper in which the jewels had been wrapped.

"I say, my man," he asked, "is this the original paper you found them in?"

"Yes, sir—the same. I ain't touched nothin'."

"Right-o."

Mr. Potts, greatly relieved, shambled out, followed by Snitkin.

"The Flatiron Building is directly across Madison Square from the Stuyvesant Club," observed Markham, frowning.

"So it is." Vance then pointed to the left-hand margin of the newspaper that held the jewels. "And you'll notice that this *Herald* of yesterday has three punctures evidently made by the pins of a wooden holder such as is generally used in a club's reading-room."

"You got a good eye, Mr. Vance," nodded Heath, inspecting the newspaper.

"I'll see about this." Markham viciously pressed a button. "They keep their papers on file for a week at the Stuyvesant Club."

When Swacker appeared, he asked that the club's steward be got immediately on the telephone. After a short delay, the connection was made. At the end of five minutes' conversation Markham hung up the receiver and gave Heath a baffled look.

"The club takes two *Heralds*. Both of yesterday's copies are there, on the rack."

"Didn't Cleaver once tell us he read nothing but *The Herald*—that and some racing-sheet at night?" Vance put the question offhandedly.

"I believe he did." Markham considered the suggestion. "Still, both the club *Heralds* are accounted for." He turned to Heath. "When you were checking up on Mannix, did you find out what clubs he belonged to?"

"Sure." The Sergeant took out his note-book and riffled the pages for a minute or two. "He's a member of the Furriers' and the Cosmopolis."

Markham pushed the telephone toward him.

"See what you can find out."

Heath was fifteen minutes at the task.

"A blank," he announced finally. "The Furriers' don't use holders, and the Cosmopolis don't keep any back numbers."

"What about Mr. Skeel's clubs, Sergeant?" asked Vance, smiling.

"Oh, I know the finding of that jewellery gums up my theory about Skeel," said Heath, with surly ill nature. "But what's the good of rubbing it in? Still, if you think I'm going to give that bird a clean bill of health just because the Odell swag was found in a trash-can, you're mighty mistaken. Don't forget we're watching the Dude pretty close. He may have got leery, and tipped off some pal he'd cached the jewels with."

"I rather fancy the experienced Skeel would have turned his booty over to a professional receiver. But even had he passed it on to a friend, would this friend have been likely to throw it away because Skeel was worried?"

"Maybe not. But there's some explanation for those jewels being found, and when we get hold of it, it won't eliminate Skeel."

"No; the explanation won't eliminate Skeel," said Vance; "but—my word!—how it'll change his *locus standi*."

Heath contemplated him with shrewdly appraising eyes. Something in Vance's tone had apparently piqued his curiosity and set him to wondering. Vance had too often been right in his diagnoses of persons and things for the Sergeant to ignore his opinions wholly.

But before he could answer, Swacker stepped alertly into the room, his eyes animated.

"Tony Skeel's on the wire, Chief, and wants to speak to you."

Markham, despite his habitual reserve, gave a start.

"Here, Sergeant," he said quickly. "Take that extension phone on the table and listen in." He nodded curtly to Swacker, who disappeared to make the connection. Then he took up the receiver of his own telephone and spoke to Skeel.

For a minute or so he listened. Then, after a brief argument, he concurred with some suggestion that had evidently been made; and the conversation ended.

"Skeel craves an audience, I gather," said Vance. "I've rather been expecting it, y' know."

"Yes. He's coming here to-morrow at ten."

"And he hinted that he knew who slew the Canary—eh, what?"

"That's just what he did say. He promised to tell me the whole story to-morrow morning."

"He's the lad that's in a position to do it," murmured Vance.

"But, Mr. Markham," said Heath, who still sat with his hand on the telephone, gazing at the instrument with dazed incredulity, "I don't see why you don't have him brought here to-day."

"As you heard, Sergeant, Skeel insisted on to-morrow, and threatened to say nothing if I forced the issue. It's just as well not to antagonize him. We might spoil a good chance of getting some light on this case if I ordered him brought here and used

pressure. And to-morrow suits me. It'll be quiet around here then. Moreover, your man's watching Skeel, and he won't get away."

"I guess you're right, sir. The Dude's touchy, and he can give a swell imitation of an oyster when he feels like it." The Sergeant spoke with feeling.

"I'll have Swacker here to-morrow to take down his statement," Markham went on; "and you'd better put one of your men on the elevator,—the regular operator is off Sundays. Also, plant a man in the hall outside, and put another one in Swacker's office."

Vance stretched himself luxuriously and rose.

"Most considerate of the gentleman to call up at this time, don't y' know. I had a longing to see the Monets at Durand-Ruel's this afternoon, and I was afraid I wasn't going to be able to drag myself away from this fascinatin' case. Now that the apocalypse has been definitely scheduled for to-morrow, I'll indulge my taste for Impressionism. . . . *À demain*, Markham. By-bye, Sergeant."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE TEN O'CLOCK APPOINTMENT

(Sunday, September 16; 10 a. m.)

A fine drizzle was falling the next morning when we rose; and a chill—the first forerunner of winter—was in the air. We had breakfast in the library at half past eight, and at nine o'clock Vance's car—which had been ordered the night before—called for us. We rode down Fifth Avenue, now almost deserted in its thick blanket of yellow fog, and called for Markham at his apartment in West 12th Street. He was waiting for us in front of the house, and stepped quickly into the car with scarcely a word of greeting. From his anxious, preoccupied look I knew that he was depending a good deal on what Skeel had to tell him.

We had turned into West Broadway beneath the Elevated tracks before any of us spoke. Then Markham voiced a doubt which was plainly an articulation of his troubled ruminations.

"I'm wondering if, after all, this fellow Skeel can have any important information to give us. His phone call was very strange. Yet he spoke confidently enough regarding his knowledge. No dramatics, no request for immunity—just a plain, assured statement that he knew who murdered the Odell girl, and had decided to come clean."

"It's certain he himself didn't strangle the lady,"

pronounced Vance. "My theory, as you know, is that he was hiding in the clothes-press when the shady business was being enacted; and all along I've clung lovingly to the idea that he was *au secret* to the entire proceedings. The keyhole of that closet door is on a direct line with the end of the davenport where the lady was strangled; and if a rival was operating at the time of his concealment, it's not unreasonable to assume that he peered forth—eh, what? I questioned him on this point, you remember; and he didn't like it a bit."

"But, in that case——"

"Oh, I know. There are all kinds of erudite objections to my wild dream.—Why didn't he give the alarm? Why didn't he tell us about it before? Why this? and why that? . . . I make no claim to omniscience, y' know; I don't even pretend to have a logical explanation for the various *traits d'union* of my vagary. My theory is only sketched in, as it were. But I'm convinced, nevertheless, that the modish Tony knows who killed his *bona roba* and looted her apartment."

"But of the three persons who possibly could have got into the Odell apartment that night—namely, Mannix, Cleaver, and Lindquist—Skeel evidently knows only one—Mannix."

"Yes—to be sure. And Mannix, it would seem, is the only one of the trio who knows Skeel. . . . An interestin' point."

Heath met us at the Franklin Street entrance to the Criminal Courts Building. He, too, was anxious and subdued, and he shook hands with us in a detached manner devoid of his usual heartiness.

"I've got Snitkin running the elevator," he said, after the briefest of salutations. "Burke's in the hall up-stairs, and Emery is with him, waiting to be let into Swacker's office."

We entered the deserted and almost silent building and rode up to the fourth floor. Markham unlocked his office door and we passed in.

"Guilfoyle, the man who's tailing Skeel," Heath explained, when we were seated, "is to report by phone to the Homicide Bureau as soon as the Dude leaves his rooms."

It was now twenty minutes to ten. Five minutes later Swacker arrived. Taking his stenographic notebook, he stationed himself just inside of the swinging door of Markham's private sanctum, where he could hear all that was said without being seen. Markham lit a cigar, and Heath followed suit. Vance was already smoking placidly. He was the calmest person in the room, and lay back languorously in one of the great leather chairs as though immune to all cares and vicissitudes. But I could tell by the over-deliberate way he flicked his ashes into the receiver that he, too, was uneasy.

Five or six minutes passed in complete silence. Then the Sergeant gave a grunt of annoyance.

"No, sir," he said, as if completing some unspoken thought, "I can't get a slant on this business. The finding of that jewellery, now, all nicely wrapped up . . . and then the Dude offering to squeal. . . . There's no sense to it."

"It's tryin', I know, Sergeant; but it's not altogether senseless." Vance was gazing lazily at the ceiling. "The chap who confiscated those baubles

didn't have any use for them. He didn't want them, in fact—they worried him abominably."

The point was too complex for Heath. The previous day's developments had shaken the foundation of all his arguments; and he lapsed again into brooding silence.

At ten o'clock he rose impatiently and, going to the hall door, looked out. Returning, he compared his watch with the office clock and began pacing restlessly. Markham was attempting to sort some papers on his desk, but presently he pushed them aside with an impatient gesture.

"He ought to be coming along now," he remarked, with an effort at cheerfulness.

"He'll come," growled Heath, "or he'll get a free ride." And he continued his pacing.

A few minutes later he turned abruptly and went out into the hall. We could hear him calling to Snitkin down the elevator shaft, but when he came back into the office his expression told us that as yet there was no news of Skeel.

"I'll call up the Bureau," he decided, "and see what Guilfoyle had to report. At least we'll know then when the Dude left his house."

But when the Sergeant had been connected with Police Headquarters he was informed that Guilfoyle had as yet made no report.

"That's damn funny," he commented, hanging up the receiver.

It was now twenty minutes past ten. Markham was growing restive. The tenacity with which the Canary murder case had resisted all his efforts toward a solution had filled him with discouragement; and

he had hoped, almost desperately, that this morning's interview with Skeel would clear up the mystery, or at least supply him with information on which definite action could be taken. Now, with Skeel late for this all-important appointment, the strain was becoming tense.

He pushed back his chair nervously and, going to the window, gazed out into the dark haze of fine rain. When he returned to his desk his face was set.

"I'll give our friend until half past ten," he said grimly. "If he isn't here then, Sergeant, you'd better call up the local station-house and have them send a patrol-wagon for him."

There was another few minutes of silence. Vance lolled in his chair with half-closed eyes, but I noticed that, though he still held his cigarette, he was not smoking. His forehead was puckered by a frown, and he was very quiet. I knew that some unusual problem was occupying him. His lethargy had in it a quality of intentness and concentration.

As I watched him he suddenly sat up straight, his eyes open and alert. He tossed his dead cigarette into the receiver with a jerky movement that attested to some inner excitation.

"Oh, my word!" he exclaimed. "It really can't be, y' know! And yet"—his face darkened—"and yet, by Jove, that's it! . . . What an ass I've been—what an unutterable ass! . . . Oh!"

He sprang to his feet; then stood looking down at the floor like a man dazed, afraid of his own thoughts.

"Markham, I don't like it—I don't like it at all." He spoke almost as if he were frightened. "I tell you, there's something terrible going on—something

uncanny. The thought of it makes my flesh creep. . . . I must be getting old and sentimental," he added, with an effort at lightness; but the look in his eyes belied his tone. "Why didn't I see this thing yesterday? . . . But I let it go on. . . ."

We were all staring at him in amazement. I had never seen him affected in this way before, and the fact that he was habitually so cynical and aloof, so adamant to emotion and impervious to outside influences, gave his words and actions an impelling and impressive quality.

After a moment he shook himself slightly, as if to throw off the pall of horror that had descended upon him, and, stepping to Markham's desk, he leaned over, resting on both hands.

"Don't you see?" he asked. "Skeel's not coming. No use to wait—no use of our having come here in the first place. We have to go to him. He's waiting for us. . . . Come! Get your hat."

Markham had risen, and Vance took him firmly by the arm.

"You needn't argue," he persisted. "You'll have to go to him sooner or later. You might as well go now, don't y' know.—My word! What a situation!"

He had led Markham, astonished and but mildly protesting, into the middle of the room, and he now beckoned to Heath with his free hand.

"You, too, Sergeant. Sorry you had all this trouble. My fault. I should have foreseen this thing. A devilish shame; but my mind was on Monets all yesterday afternoon. . . . You know where Skeel lives?"

Heath nodded mechanically. He had fallen under

the spell of Vance's strange and dynamic importunities.

"Then don't wait.—And, Sergeant! You'd better bring Burke or Snitkin along. They won't be needed here—nobody'll be needed here any more to-day."

Heath looked inquiringly to Markham for counsel: his bewilderment had thrown him into a state of mute indecision. Markham nodded his approval of Vance's suggestions, and, without a word, slipped into his raincoat. A few minutes later the four of us, accompanied by Snitkin, had entered Vance's car and were lurching up-town. Swacker had been sent home; the office had been locked up; and Burke and Emery had departed for the Homicide Bureau to await further instructions.

Skeel lived in 35th Street, near the East River, in a dingy, but once pretentious, house which formerly had been the residence of some old family of the better class. It now had an air of dilapidation and decay; there was rubbish in the areaway; and a large sign announcing rooms for rent was posted in one of the ground-floor windows.

As we drew up before it Heath sprang to the street and looked sharply about him. Presently he espied an unkempt man slouching in the doorway of a grocery-store diagonally opposite, and beckoned to him. The man shambled over furtively.

"It's all right, Guilfoyle," the Sergeant told him. "We're paying the Dude a social visit.—What's the trouble? Why didn't you report?"

Guilfoyle looked surprised.

"I was told to phone in when he left the house, sir. But he ain't left yet. Mallory tailed him home

last night round ten o'clock, and I relieved Mallory at nine this morning. The Dude's still inside."

"Of course he's still inside, Sergeant," said Vance, a bit impatiently.

"Where's his room situated, Guilfoyle?" asked Heath.

"Second floor, at the back."

"Right. We're going in.—Stand by."

"Look out for him," admonished Guilfoyle. "He's got a gat."

Heath took the lead up the worn steps which led from the pavement to the little vestibule. Without ringing, he roughly grasped the door-knob and shook it. The door was unlocked, and we stepped into the stuffy lower hallway.

A bedraggled woman of about forty, in a disreputable dressing-gown, and with hair hanging in strings over her shoulders, emerged suddenly from a rear door and came toward us unsteadily, her bleary eyes focused on us with menacing resentment.

"Say!" she burst out, in a rasping voice. "What do youse mean by bustin' in like this on a respectable lady?" And she launched forth upon a stream of profane epithets.

Heath, who was nearest her, placed his large hand over her face, and gave her a gentle but firm shove backward.

"You keep outa this, Cleopatra!" he advised her, and began to ascend the stairs.

The second-floor hallway was dimly lighted by a small flickering gas-jet, and at the rear we could distinguish the outlines of a single door set in the middle of the wall.

"That'll be Mr. Skeel's abode," observed Heath.

He walked up to it and, dropping one hand in his right coat-pocket, turned the knob. But the door was locked. He then knocked violently upon it, and placing his ear to the jamb, listened. Snitkin stood directly behind him, his hand also in his pocket. The rest of us remained a little in the rear.

Heath had knocked a second time when Vance's voice spoke up from the semidarkness.

"I say, Sergeant, you're wasting time with all that formality."

"I guess you're right," came the answer after a moment of what seemed unbearable silence.

Heath bent down and looked at the lock. Then he took some instrument from his pocket and inserted it into the keyhole.

"You're right," he repeated. "The key's gone."

He stepped back and, balancing on his toes like a sprinter, sent his shoulders crashing against the panel directly over the knob. But the lock held.

"Come on, Snitkin," he ordered.

The two detectives hurled themselves against the door. At the third onslaught there was a splintering of wood and a tearing of the lock's bolt through the moulding. The door swung drunkenly inward.

The room was in almost complete darkness. We all hesitated on the threshold, while Snitkin crossed warily to one of the windows and sent the shade clattering up. The yellow-gray light filtered in, and the objects of the room at once took definable form. A large, old-fashioned bed projected from the wall on the right.

"Look!" cried Snitkin, pointing; and something in his voice sent a shiver over me.

We pressed forward. On the foot of the bed, at the side toward the door, sprawled the crumpled body of Skeel. Like the Canary, he had been strangled. His head hung back over the foot-board, his face a hideous distortion. His arms were outstretched and one leg trailed over the edge of the mattress, resting on the floor.

"Thuggee," murmured Vance. "Lindquist mentioned it.—Curious!"

Heath stood staring fixedly at the body, his shoulders hunched. His normal ruddiness of complexion was gone, and he seemed like a man hypnotized.

"Mother o' God!" he breathed, awe-stricken. And, with an involuntary motion, he crossed himself.

Markham was shaken also. He set his jaw rigidly.

"You're right, Vance." His voice was strained and unnatural. "Something sinister and terrible has been going on here. . . . There's a fiend loose in this town—a werewolf."

"I wouldn't say that, old man." Vance regarded the murdered Skeel critically. "No, I wouldn't say that. Not a werewolf. Just a desperate human being. A man of extremes, perhaps—but quite rational, and logical—oh, how deuced logical!"

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ARREST

(*Sunday, p. m., Monday, a. m.; September 16–17*)

The investigation into Skeel's death was pushed with great vigor by the authorities. Doctor Doremus, the Medical Examiner, arrived promptly and declared that the crime had taken place between ten o'clock and midnight. Immediately Vance insisted that all the men who were known to have been intimately acquainted with the Odell girl—Mannix, Lindquist, Cleaver, and Spotswoode—be interviewed at once and made to explain where they were during these two hours. Markham agreed without hesitation, and gave the order to Heath, who at once put four of his men on the task.

Mallory, the detective who had shadowed Skeel the previous night, was questioned regarding possible visitors; but inasmuch as the house where Skeel lived accommodated over twenty roomers, who were constantly coming and going at all hours, no information could be gained through that channel. All that Mallory could say definitely was that Skeel had returned home at about ten o'clock, and had not come out again. The landlady, sobered and subdued by the tragedy, repudiated all knowledge of the affair. She explained that she had been "ill" in her room from dinner-time until we had disturbed her recuperation the next morning. The front door, it seemed,

was never locked, since her tenants objected to such an unnecessary inconvenience. The tenants themselves were questioned, but without result: they were not of a class likely to give information to the police, even had they possessed any.

The finger-print experts made a careful examination of the room, but failed to find any marks except Skeel's own. A thorough search through the murdered man's effects occupied several hours; but nothing was discovered that gave any hint of the murderer's identity. A .38 Colt automatic, fully loaded, was found under one of the pillows on the bed; and eleven hundred dollars, in bills of large denomination, was taken from a hollow brass curtain-rod. Also, under a loose board in the hall, the missing steel chisel, with the fissure in the blade, was found. But these items were of no value in solving the mystery of Skeel's death; and at four o'clock in the afternoon the room was closed with an emergency padlock and put under guard.

Markham and Vance and I had remained several hours after our discovery of the body. Markham had taken immediate charge of the case, and had conducted the interrogation of the tenants. Vance had watched the routine activities of the police with unwonted intentness, and had even taken part in the search. He had seemed particularly interested in Skeel's evening clothes, and had examined them garment by garment. Heath had looked at him from time to time, but there had been neither contempt nor amusement in the Sergeant's glances.

At half past two Markham departed, after informing Heath that he would be at the Stuyvesant

Club during the remainder of the day; and Vance and I went with him. We had a belated luncheon in the empty grill.

"This Skeel episode rather knocks the foundation from under everything," Markham said dispiritedly, as our coffee was served.

"Oh, no—not that," Vance answered. "Rather, let us say that it has added a new column to the edifice of my giddy theory."

"Your theory—yes. It's about all that's left to go on." Markham sighed. "It has certainly received substantiation this morning. . . . Remarkable how you called the turn when Skeel failed to show up."

Again Vance contradicted him.

"You overestimate my little flutter in forensics, Markham dear. You see, I assumed that the lady's strangler knew of Skeel's offer to you. That offer was probably a threat of some kind on Skeel's part; otherwise he wouldn't have set the appointment a day ahead. He no doubt hoped the victim of his threat would become amenable in the meantime. And that money hidden in the curtain-rod leads me to think he was blackmailing the Canary's murderer, and had been refused a further donation just before he phoned you yesterday. That would account, too, for his having kept his guilty knowledge to himself all this time."

"You may be right. But now we're worse off than ever, for we haven't even Skeel to guide us."

"At least we've forced our elusive culprit to commit a second crime to cover up his first, don't y' know. And when we have learned what the Canary's various amorists were doing last night between ten

and twelve, we may have something suggestive on which to work.—By the bye, when may we expect this thrillin' information?"

"It depends upon what luck Heath's men have. To-night some time, if everything goes well."

It was, in fact, about half past eight when Heath telephoned the reports. But here again Markham seemed to have drawn a blank. A less satisfactory account could scarcely be imagined. Doctor Lindquist had suffered a "nervous stroke" the preceding afternoon, and had been taken to the Episcopal Hospital. He was still there under the care of two eminent physicians whose word it was impossible to doubt; and it would be a week at least before he would be able to resume his work. This report was the only definite one of the four, and it completely exonerated the doctor from any participation in the previous night's crime.

By a curious coincidence neither Mannix, nor Cleaver, nor Spotswoode could furnish a satisfactory alibi. All three of them, according to their statements, had remained at home the night before. The weather had been inclement; and though Mannix and Spotswoode admitted to having been out earlier in the evening, they stated that they had returned home before ten o'clock. Mannix lived in an apartment-hotel, and, as it was Saturday night, the lobby was crowded, so that no one would have been likely to see him come in. Cleaver lived in a small private apartment-house without a door-man or hallboys to observe his movements. Spotswoode was staying at the Stuyvesant Club, and since his rooms were on the third floor, he rarely used the elevator. More-

over, there had been a political reception and dance at the club the previous night, and he might have walked in and out at random a dozen times without being noticed.

"Not what you'd call illuminatin'," said Vance, when Markham had given him this information.

"It eliminates Lindquist, at any rate."

"Quite. And, automatically, it eliminates him as an object of suspicion in the Canary's death also; for these two crimes are part of a whole—integers of the same problem. They complement each other. The latter was conceived in relation to the first—was, in fact, a logical outgrowth of it."

Markham nodded.

"That's reasonable enough. Anyway, I've passed the combative stage. I think I'll drift for a while on the stream of your theory and see what happens."

"What irks me is the disquietin' feeling that positively nothing will happen unless we force the issue. The lad who manœuvred those two obits had real bean in him."

As he spoke Spotswoode entered the room and looked about as if searching for some one. Catching sight of Markham, he came briskly forward, with a look of inquisitive perplexity.

"Forgive me for intruding, sir," he apologized, nodding pleasantly to Vance and me, "but a police officer was here this afternoon inquiring as to my whereabouts last night. It struck me as strange, but I thought little of it until I happened to see the name of Tony Skeel in the headlines of a 'special' to-night and read he had been strangled. I remember you asked me regarding such a man in connec-

tion with Miss Odell, and I wondered if, by any chance, there could be any connection between the two murders, and if I was, after all, to be drawn into the affair."

"No, I think not," said Markham. "There seemed a possibility that the two crimes were related; and, as a matter of routine, the police questioned all the close friends of Miss Odell in the hope of turning up something suggestive. You may dismiss the matter from your mind. I trust," he added, "the officer was not unpleasantly importunate."

"Not at all." Spotswoode's look of anxiety disappeared. "He was extremely courteous but a bit mysterious.—Who was this man Skeel?"

"A half-world character and ex-burglar. He had some hold on Miss Odell, and, I believe, extorted money from her."

A cloud of angry disgust passed over Spotswoode's face.

"A creature like that deserves the fate that overtook him."

We chatted on various matters until ten o'clock, when Vance rose and gave Markham a reproachful look.

"I'm going to try to recover some lost sleep. I'm temperamentally unfitted for a policeman's life."

Despite this complaint, however, nine o'clock the next morning found him at the District Attorney's office. He had brought several newspapers with him, and was reading, with much amusement, the first complete accounts of Skeel's murder. Monday was generally a busy day for Markham, and he had arrived at the office before half past eight in an effort

to clean up some pressing routine matters before proceeding with his investigation of the Odell case. Heath, I knew, was to come for a conference at ten o'clock. In the meantime there was nothing for Vance to do but read the newspapers; and I occupied myself in like manner.

Punctually at ten Heath arrived, and from his manner it was plain that something had happened to cheer him immeasurably. He was almost jaunty, and his formal, self-satisfied salutation to Vance was like that of a conqueror to a vanquished adversary. He shook hands with Markham with more than his customary punctility.

"Our troubles are over, sir," he said, and paused to light his cigar. "I've arrested Jessup."

It was Vance who broke the dramatic silence following this astounding announcement.

"In the name of Heaven—what for?"

Heath turned deliberately, in no wise abashed by the other's tone.

"For the murder of Margaret Odell and Tony Skeel."

"Oh, my aunt! Oh, my precious aunt!" Vance sat up and stared at him in amazement. "Sweet angels of heaven, come down and solace me!"

Heath's complacency was unshaken.

"You won't need no angels, or aunts either, when you hear what I've found out about this fellow. I've got him tied up in a sack, ready to hand to the jury."

The first wave of Markham's astonishment had subsided.

"Let's have the story, Sergeant."

Heath settled himself in a chair. He took a few moments to arrange his thoughts.

"It's like this, sir. Yesterday afternoon I got to thinking. Here was Skeel murdered, same like Odell, after he'd promised to squeal; and it certainly looked as though the same guy had strangled both of 'em. Therefore, I concluded that there musta been two guys in the apartment Monday night—the Dude and the murderer—just like Mr. Vance has been saying all along. Then I figured that they knew each other pretty well, because not only did the other fellow know where the Dude lived, but he musta been wise to the fact that the Dude was going to squeal yesterday. It looked to me, sir, like they had pulled the Odell job together—which is why the Dude didn't squeal in the first place. But after the other fellow lost his nerve and threw the jewellery away, Skeel thought he'd play safe by turning state's evidence, so he phoned you."

The Sergeant smoked a moment.

"I never put much stock in Mannix and Cleaver and the doc. They weren't the kind to do a job like that, and they certainly weren't the kind that would be mixed up with a jailbird like Skeel. So I stood all three of 'em to one side, and began looking round for a bad egg—somebody who'd have been likely to be Skeel's accomplice. But first I tried to figure out what you might call the physical obstacles in the case—that is, the snags we were up against in our reconstruction of the crime."

Again he paused.

"Now, the thing that's been bothering us most is that side door. How did it get unbolted after six

o'clock? And who bolted it again after the crime? Skeel musta come in by it before eleven, because he was in the apartment when Spotswoode and Odell returned from the theatre; and he probably went out by it after Cleaver had come to the apartment at about midnight. But that wasn't explaining how it got bolted again on the inside. Well, sir, I studied over this for a long time yesterday, and then I went up to the house and took another look at the door. Young Spively was running the switchboard, and I asked him where Jessup was, for I wanted to ask him some questions. And Spively told me he'd quit his job the day before—Saturday afternoon!"

Heath waited to let this fact sink in.

"I was on my way down-town before the idea came to me. Then it hit me sudden-like; and the whole case broke wide open.—Mr. Markham, nobody but Jessup coulda opened that side door and locked it again—nobody. Figure it out for yourself, sir—though I guess you've pretty well done it already. Skeel couldn't've done it. And there wasn't nobody else to do it."

Markham had become interested, and leaned forward.

"After this idea had hit me," Heath continued, "I decided to take a chance; so I got outa the Subway at the Penn Station, and phoned Spively for Jessup's address. Then I got my first good news: Jessup lived on Second Avenue, right around the corner from Skeel! I picked up a coupla men from the local station, and went to his house. We found him packing up his things, getting ready to go to Detroit. We locked him up, and I took his finger-prints and sent

'em to Dubois. I thought I might get a line on him that way, because crooks don't generally begin with a job as big as the Canary prowl."

Heath permitted himself a grin of satisfaction.

"Well, sir, Dubois nailed him up! His name ain't Jessup at all. The William part is all right, but his real moniker is Benton. He was convicted of assault and battery in Oakland in 1909, and served a year in San Quentin when Skeel was a prisoner there. He was also grabbed as a lookout in a bank robbery in Brooklyn in 1914, but didn't come to trial—that's how we happen to have his finger-prints at Headquarters. When we put him on the grill last night, he said he changed his name after the Brooklyn racket, and enlisted in the army. That's all we could get outa him; but we didn't need any more.—Now, here are the facts: Jessup has served time for assault and battery. He was mixed up in a bank robbery. Skeel was a fellow prisoner of his. He's got no alibi for Saturday night when Skeel was killed, and he lives round the corner. He quit his job suddenly Saturday afternoon. He's husky and strong and could easily have done the business. He was planning his getaway when we nabbed him. *And*—he's the only person who could've unbolted and rebolted that side door Monday night. . . . Is that a case, or ain't it, Mr. Markham?"

Markham sat several minutes in thought.

"It's a good case as far as it goes," he said slowly. "But what was his motive in strangling the girl?"

"That's easy. Mr. Vance here suggested it the first day. You remember he asked Jessup about his feelings for Odell; and Jessup turned red and got nervous."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed Vance. "Am I to be made responsible for any part of this priceless lunacy? . . . True, I pried into the chap's emotions toward the lady; but that was before anything had come to light. I was bein' careful—tryin' to test each possibility as it arose."

"Well, that was a lucky question of yours, just the same." Heath turned back to Markham. "As I see it: Jessup was stuck on Odell, and she told him to trot along and sell his papers. He got all worked up over it, sitting there night after night, seeing these other guys calling on her. Then Skeel comes along, and, recognizing him, suggests burglarizing Odell's apartment. Skeel can't do the job without help, for he has to pass the phone operator coming and going; and as he's been there before, he'd be recognized. Jessup sees a chance of getting even with Odell and putting the blame on some one else; so the two of 'em cook up the job for Monday night. When Odell goes out Jessup unlocks the side door, and the Dude lets himself into the apartment with his own key. Then Odell and Spotswoode arrive unexpectedly. Skeel hides in the closet, and after Spotswoode has gone, he accidentally makes a noise, and Odell screams. He steps out, and when she sees who he is, she tells Spotswoode it's a mistake. Jessup now knows Skeel has been discovered, and decides to make use of the fact. Soon after Spotswoode has gone, he enters the apartment with a pass-key. Skeel, thinking it's somebody else, hides again in the closet; and then Jessup grabs the girl and strangles her, intending to let Skeel get the credit for it. But Skeel comes out of hiding and they talk it over. Finally they come to

an agreement, and proceed with their original plan to loot the place. Jessup tries to open the jewel-case with the poker, and Skeel finishes the job with his chisel. They then go out. Skeel leaves by the side door, and Jessup rebolts it. The next day Skeel hands the swag to Jessup to keep till things blow over; and Jessup gets scared and throws it away. Then they have a row. Skeel decides to tell everything, so he can get out from under; and Jessup, suspecting he's going to do it, goes round to his house Saturday night and strangles him like he did Odell."

Heath made a gesture of finality and sank back in his chair.

"Clever—deuced clever," murmured Vance. "Sergeant, I apologize for my little outburst a moment ago. Your logic is irreproachable. You've reconstructed the crime beautifully. You've solved the case. . . . It's wonderful—simply wonderful. But it's wrong."

"It's right enough to send Mr. Jessup to the chair."

"That's the terrible thing about logic," said Vance. "It so often leads one irresistibly to a false conclusion."

He stood up and walked across the room and back, his hands in his coat-pockets. When he came abreast of Heath he halted.

"I say, Sergeant; if somebody else could have unlocked that side door, and then rebolted it again after the crime, you'd be willing to admit that it would weaken your case against Jessup—eh, what?"

Heath was in a generous mood.

"Sure. Show me some one else who coulda done that, and I'll admit that maybe I'm wrong."

"Skeel could have done it, Sergeant. And he did do it—without any one knowing it."

"Skeel!—This ain't the age of miracles, Mr. Vance."

Vance swung about and faced Markham.

"Listen! I'm telling you Jessup's innocent." He spoke with a fervor that amazed me. "And I'm going to prove it to you—some way. My theory is pretty complete; it's deficient only in one or two small points; and, I'll confess, I haven't yet been able to put a name to the culprit. But it's the right theory, Markham, and it's diametrically opposed to the Sergeant's. Therefore, you've got to give me an opportunity to demonstrate it before you proceed against Jessup. Now, I can't demonstrate it here; so you and Heath must come with me to the Odell house. It won't take over an hour. But if it took a week, you'd have to come just the same."

He stepped nearer to the desk.

"I know that it was Skeel, and not Jessup, who unbolted that door before the crime, and rebolted it afterward."

Markham was impressed.

"You know this—you know it for a fact?"

"Yes! And I know how he did it!"

CHAPTER XXV

VANCE DEMONSTRATES

(Monday, September 17; 11.30 a. m.)

Half an hour later we entered the little apartment-house in 71st Street. Despite the plausibility of Heath's case against Jessup, Markham was not entirely satisfied with the arrest; and Vance's attitude had sown further seeds of doubt in his mind. The strongest point against Jessup was that relating to the bolting and unbolting of the side door; and when Vance had asserted that he was able to demonstrate how Skeel could have manipulated his own entrance and exit, Markham, though only partly convinced, had agreed to accompany him. Heath, too, was interested, and, though supercilious, had expressed a willingness to go along.

Spively, scintillant in his chocolate-colored suit, was at the switchboard, and stared at us apprehensively. But when Vance suggested pleasantly that he take a ten-minute walk round the block, he appeared greatly relieved, and lost no time in complying.

The officer on guard outside of the Odell apartment came forward and saluted.

"How goes it?" asked Heath. "Any visitors?"

"Only one—a toff who said he'd known the Canary and wanted to see the apartment. I told him to get an order from you or the District Attorney."

"That was correct, officer," said Markham; then, turning to Vance: "Probably Spotswoode—poor devil."

"Quite," murmured Vance. "So persistent! Rosemary and all that. . . . Touchin'."

Heath told the officer to go for a half-hour's stroll; and we were left alone.

"And now, Sergeant," said Vance cheerfully, "I'm sure you know how to operate a switchboard. Be so kind as to act as Spively's understudy for a few minutes—there's a good fellow. . . . But, first, please bolt the side door—and be sure that you bolt it securely, just as it was on the fatal night."

Heath grinned good-naturedly.

"Sure thing." He put his forefinger to his lips mysteriously, and, crouching, tiptoed down the hall like a burlesque detective in a farce. After a few moments he came tiptoeing back to the switchboard, his finger still on his lips. Then, glancing surreptitiously about him with globular eyes, he put his mouth to Vance's ear.

"His-s-s-t!" he whispered. "The door's bolted. G-r-r-r. . . ." He sat down at the switchboard. "When does the curtain go up, Mr. Vance?"

"It's up, Sergeant." Vance fell in with Heath's jocular mood. "Behold! The hour is half past nine on Monday night. You are Spively—not nearly so elegant; and you forgot the moustache—but still Spively. And I am the bedizened Skeel. For the sake of realism, please try to imagine me in chamois gloves and a pleated silk shirt. Mr. Markham and Mr. Van Dine here represent 'the many-headed monster of the pit.'—And, by the bye, Sergeant, let

me have the key to the Odell apartment: Skeel had one, don't y' know."

Heath produced the key and handed it over, still grinning.

"A word of stage-direction," Vance continued. "When I have departed by the front door, you are to wait exactly three minutes, and then knock at the late Canary's apartment.

He sauntered to the front door and, turning, walked back toward the switchboard. Markham and I stood behind Heath in the little alcove, facing the front of the building.

"Enter Mr. Skeel!" announced Vance. "Remember, it's half past nine." Then, as he came abreast of the switchboard: "Dash it all! You forgot your lines, Sergeant. You should have told me that Miss Odell was out. But it doesn't matter. . . . Mr. Skeel continues to the lady's door . . . thus."

He walked past us, and we heard him ring the apartment bell. After a brief pause, he knocked on the door. Then he came back down the hall.

"I guess you were right," he said, quoting the words of Skeel as reported by Spively; and went on to the front door. Stepping out into the street, he turned toward Broadway.

For exactly three minutes we waited. None of us spoke. Heath had become serious, and his accelerated puffing on his cigar bore evidence of his state of expectancy. Markham was frowning stoically. At the end of the three minutes Heath rose and hurried up the hall, with Markham and me at his heels. In answer to his knock, the apartment door was opened from the inside. Vance was standing in the little foyer.

"The end of the first act," he greeted us airily. "Thus did Mr. Skeel enter the lady's boudoir Monday night after the side door had been bolted, without the operator's seeing him."

Heath narrowed his eyes, but said nothing. Then he suddenly swung round and looked down the rear passageway to the oak door at the end. The handle of the bolt was in a vertical position, showing that the catch had been turned and that the door was unbolted. Heath regarded it for several moments; then he turned his eyes toward the switchboard. Presently he let out a gleeful whoop.

"Very good, Mr. Vance—very good!" he proclaimed, nodding his head knowingly. "That was easy, though. And it don't take psychology to explain it.—After you rang the apartment bell, you ran down this rear hallway and unbolted the door. Then you ran back and knocked. After that you went out the front entrance, turned toward Broadway, swung round across the street, came in the alley, walked in the side door, and quietly let yourself into the apartment behind our backs."

"Simple, wasn't it?" agreed Vance.

"Sure." The Sergeant was almost contemptuous. "But that don't get you nowhere. Anybody coulda figured it out if that had been the only problem connected with Monday night's operations. But it's the rebolting of that side door, after Skeel had gone, that's been occupying my mind. Skeel might've—*might've*, mind you—got in the way you did. But he couldn't have got out that way, because the door was bolted the next morning. And if there was some one here to bolt the door after him, then that same

person could've unbolted the door for him earlier, without his doing the ten-foot dash down the rear hall to unbolt the door himself at half past nine. So I don't see that your interesting little drama helps Jessup out any."

"Oh, but the drama isn't over," Vance replied. "The curtain is about to go up on the next act."

Heath lifted his eyes sharply.

"Yeah?" His tone was one of almost jeering incredulity, but his expression was searching and dubious. "And you're going to show us how Skeel got out and bolted the door on the inside without Jessup's help?"

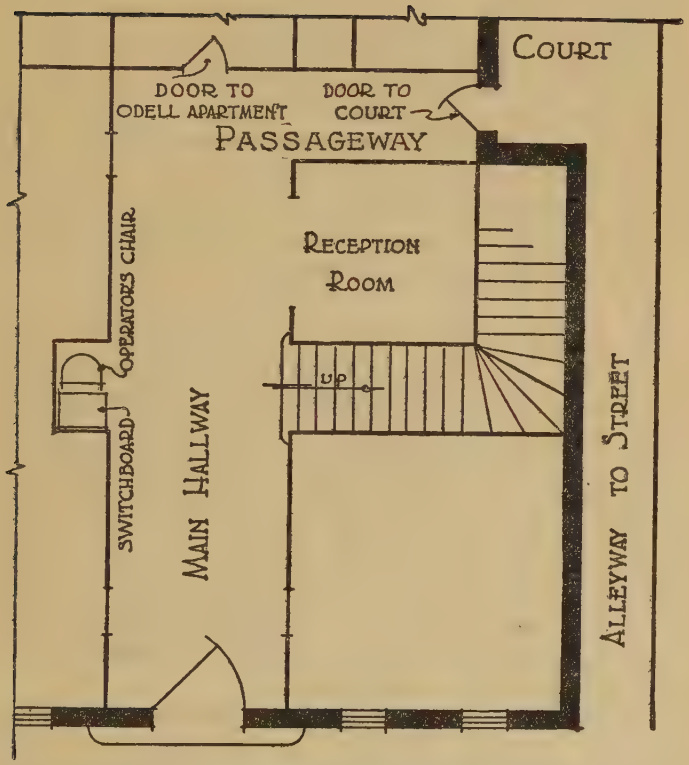
"That is precisely what I intend to do, my Sergeant."

Heath opened his mouth to speak, but thought better of it. Instead, he merely shrugged his shoulders and gave Markham a sly look.

"Let us repair to the public atrium," proceeded Vance; and he led us into the little reception-room diagonally opposite to the switchboard. This room, as I have explained, was just beyond the staircase, and along its rear wall ran the little passageway to the side door. (A glance at the accompanying diagram will clarify the arrangement.)

Vance shepherded us ceremoniously to chairs, and cocked his eye at the Sergeant.

"You will be so good as to rest here until you hear me knock at the side door. Then come and open it for me." He went toward the archway. "Once more I personate the departed Mr. Skeel; so picture me again *en grande tenue*—sartorially radiant. . . . The curtain ascends."



WEST SEVENTY-FIRST STREET

He bowed and, stepping from the reception-room into the main hall, disappeared round the corner into the rear passageway.

Heath shifted his position restlessly and gave Markham a questioning, troubled look.

"Will he pull it off, sir, do you think?" All jocularity had gone out of his tone.

"I can't see how." Markham was scowling. "If he does, though, it will knock the chief underpinning from your theory of Jessup's guilt."

"I'm not worrying," declared Heath. "Mr. Vance knows a lot; he's got ideas. But how in hell——?"

He was interrupted by a loud knocking on the side door. The three of us sprang up simultaneously and hurried round the corner of the main hall. The rear passageway was empty. There was no door or aperture of any kind on either side of it. It consisted of two blank walls; and at the end, occupying almost its entire width, was the oak door which led to the court. Vance could have disappeared only through that oak door. And the thing we all noticed at once—for our eyes had immediately sought it—was the horizontal position of the bolt-handle. This meant that the door was bolted.

Heath was not merely astonished—he was dumbfounded. Markham had halted abruptly, and stood staring down the empty passageway as if he saw a ghost. After a momentary hesitation Heath walked rapidly to the door. But he did not open it at once. He went down on his knees before the lock and scrutinized the bolt carefully. Then he took out his pocket-knife and inserted the blade into the crack

between the door and the casing. The point halted against the inner moulding, and the edge of the blade scraped upon the circular bolt. There was no question that the heavy oak casings and mouldings of the door were solid and well fitted, and that the bolt had been securely thrown from the inside. Heath, however, was still suspicious, and, grasping the door-knob, he tugged at it violently. But the door held firmly. At length he threw the bolt-handle to a vertical position and opened the door. Vance was standing in the court, placidly smoking and inspecting the brickwork of the alley wall.

"I say, Markham," he remarked, "here's a curious thing. This wall, d' ye know, must be very old. It wasn't built in these latter days of breathless efficiency. The beauty-loving mason who erected it laid the bricks in Flemish bond instead of the Running—or Stretcher—bond of our own restless age. And up there a bit"—he pointed toward the rear yard—"is a Rowlock and Checkerboard pattern. Very neat and very pretty—more pleasing even than the popular English Cross bond. And the mortar joints are all V-tooled. . . . Fancy!"

Markham was fuming.

"Damn it, Vance! I'm not building brick walls. What I want to know is how you got out here and left the door bolted on the inside."

"Oh, that!" Vance crushed out his cigarette and re-entered the building. "I merely made use of a bit of clever criminal mechanism. It's very simple, like all truly effective appliances—oh, simple beyond words. I blush at its simplicity. . . . Observe!"

He took from his pocket a tiny pair of tweezers

to the end of which was tied a piece of purple twine about four feet long. Placing the tweezers over the vertical bolt-handle, he turned them at a very slight angle to the left and then ran the twine under the door so that about a foot of it projected over the sill. Stepping into the court, he closed the door.

The tweezers still held the bolt-handle as in a vise, and the string extended straight to the floor and disappeared under the door into the court. The three of us stood watching the bolt with fascinated attention. Slowly the string became taut, as Vance gently pulled upon the loose end outside, and then the downward tug began slowly but surely to turn the bolt-handle. When the bolt had been thrown

and the handle was in a horizontal position, there came a slight jerk on the string. The tweezers were disengaged from the bolt-handle, and fell noiselessly to the carpeted floor. Then as the string was pulled from without, the tweezers disappeared under the crack between the bottom of the door and the sill.

"Childish, what?" commented Vance, when Heath had let him in. "Silly, too, isn't it? And yet, Sergeant dear, that's how the deceased Tony left these premises last Monday night. . . . But let's go into the lady's apartment, and I'll tell you a story. I see that Mr. Spively has returned from his promenade; so he can resume his telephonic duties and leave us free for a *causerie*."

"When did you think up that hocus-pocus with the tweezers and string?" demanded Markham irritably, when we were seated in the Odell living-room.

"I didn't think it up at all, don't y' know," Vance told him carelessly, selecting a cigarette with annoying deliberation. "It was Mr. Skeel's idea. Ingenious lad—eh, what?"

"Come, come!" Markham's equanimity was at last shaken. "How can you possibly know that Skeel used this means of locking himself out?"

"I found the little apparatus in his evening clothes yesterday morning."

"What!" cried Heath belligerently. "You took that outa Skeel's room yesterday during the search, without saying anything about it?"

"Oh, only after your ferrets had passed it by. In fact, I didn't even look at the gentleman's clothes until your experienced searchers had inspected them and relocked the wardrobe door. Y' see, Sergeant,

this little thingumbob was stuffed away in one of the pockets of Skeel's dress waistcoat, under the silver cigarette-case. I'll admit I went over his evening suit rather lovin'ly. He wore it, y' know, on the night the lady departed this life, and I hoped to find some slight indication of his collaboration in the event. When I found this little eyebrow-plucker, I hadn't the slightest inkling of its significance. And the purple twine attached to it bothered me frightfully, don't y' know. I could see that Mr. Skeel didn't pluck his eyebrows; and even if he had been addicted to the practice, why the twine? The tweezers are a delicate little gold affair—just what the ravishin' Margaret might have used; and last Tuesday morning I noticed a small lacquer tray containing similar toilet accessories on her dressing-table near the jewel-case.—But that wasn't all."

He pointed to the little vellum waste-basket beside the escritoire, in which lay a large crumpled mass of heavy paper.

"I also noticed that piece of discarded wrapping-paper stamped with the name of a well-known Fifth Avenue novelty shop; and this morning, on my way down-town, I dropped in at the shop and learned that they make a practice of tying up their bundles with purple twine. Therefore, I concluded that Skeel had taken the tweezers and the twine from this apartment during his visit here that eventful night. . . . Now, the question was: Why should he have spent his time tying strings to eyebrow-pluckers? I confess, with maidenly modesty, that I couldn't find an answer. But this morning when you told of arresting Jessup, and emphasized the rebolt-

ing of the side door after Skeel's departure, the fog lifted, the sun shone, the birds began to sing. I became suddenly mediumistic: I had a psychic seizure. The whole *modus operandi* came to me—as they say—in a flash. . . . I told you, Markham old thing, it would take spiritualism to solve this case."

CHAPTER XXVI

RECONSTRUCTING THE CRIME

(*Monday, September 17; noon*)

When Vance finished speaking, there was several minutes' silence. Markham sat deep in his chair glaring into space. Heath, however, was watching Vance with a kind of grudging admiration. The corner-stone in the foundation of his case against Jessup had been knocked out, and the structure he had built was tottering precariously. Markham realized this, and the fact played havoc with his hopes.

"I wish your inspirations were more helpful," he grumbled, turning his gaze upon Vance. "This latest revelation of yours puts us back almost to where we started from."

"Oh, don't be pessimistic. Let us face the future with a bright eye. . . . Want to hear my theory? —it's fairly bulging with possibilities." He arranged himself comfortably in his chair. "Skeel needed money—no doubt his silk shirts were running low—and after his unsuccessful attempt to extort it from the lady a week before her demise, he came here last Monday night. He had learned she would be out, and he intended to wait for her; for she had probably refused to receive him in the custom'ry social way. He knew the side door was bolted at night, and, as he

didn't want to be seen entering the apartment, he devised the little scheme of unbolting the door for himself under cover of a futile call at half past nine. The unbolting accomplished, he returned *via* the alleyway, and let himself into the apartment at some time before eleven. When the lady returned with an escort, he quickly hid in the clothes-closet, and remained there until the escort had departed. Then he came forth, and the lady, startled by his sudden appearance, screamed. But, on recognizing him, she told Spotswoode, who was now hammering at the door, that it was all a mistake. So Spotswoode ran along and played poker. A financial discussion between Skeel and the lady—probably a highly acrimonious tiff—ensued. In the midst of it the telephone rang, and Skeel snatched off the receiver and said the Canary was out. The tiff was resumed; but presently another suitor appeared on the scene. Whether he rang the bell or let himself in with a key I can't say—probably the latter, for the phone operator was unaware of his visit. Skeel hid himself a second time in the closet, and luckily took the precaution of locking himself in. Also, he quite naturally put his eye to the keyhole to see who the second intruder was."

Vance pointed to the closet door.

"The keyhole, you will observe, is on a line with the davenport; and as Skeel peered out into the room he saw a sight that froze his blood. The new arrival —in the midst, perhaps, of some endearing sentence —seized the lady by the throat and proceeded to throttle her. . . . Imagine Skeel's emotions, my dear Markham. There he was, crouching in a dark

closet, and a few feet from him stood a murderer in the act of strangling a lady! *Pauvre Antoine!* I don't wonder he was petrified and speechless. He saw what he imagined to be maniacal fury in the strangler's eyes; and the strangler must have been a fairly powerful creature, whereas Skeel was slender and almost undersized. . . . No, *merci.* Skeel wasn't having any. He lay doggo. And I can't say that I blame the beggar, what?"

He made a gesture of interrogation.

"What did the strangler do next? Well, well; we'll probably never know, now that Skeel, the horrified witness, has gone to his Maker. But I rather imagine he got out that black document-box, opened it with a key he had taken from the lady's hand-bag, and extracted a goodly number of incriminating documents. Then, I fancy, the fireworks began. The gentleman proceeded to wreck the apartment in order to give the effect of a professional burglary. He tore the lace on the lady's gown and severed the shoulder-strap; snatched her orchid corsage and threw it in her lap; stripped off her rings and bracelets; and tore the pendant from its chain. After that he upset the lamp, rifled the escritoire, ransacked the Boule cabinet, broke the mirror, overturned the chairs, tore the draperies. . . . And all the time Skeel kept his eye glued to the keyhole with fascinated horror, afraid to move, terrified lest he be discovered and sent to join his erstwhile *inamorata*, for by now he was no doubt thoroughly convinced that the man outside was a raving lunatic.—I can't say that I envy Skeel his predicament: it was ticklish, y' know. Rather!—And the devastation went

on. He could hear it even when the operations had passed from out his radius of vision. And he himself was caught like a rat in a trap, with no means of escape. A harrowin' situation—my word!"

Vance smoked a moment, and then shifted his position slightly.

"Y' know, Markham, I imagine that the worst moment in the whole of Skeel's checkered career came when that mysterious wrecker tried to open the closet door behind which he was crouching. Fancy! There he was cornered, and not two inches from him stood, apparently, a homicidal maniac trying to get to him, rattling that thin barricade of white pine. . . . Can you picture the blighter's relief when the murderer finally released the knob and turned away? It's a wonder he didn't collapse from the reaction. But he didn't. He listened and watched in a sort of hypnotic panic, until he heard the invader leave the apartment. Then, weak-kneed and in a cold sweat, he came forth and surveyed the battlefield."

Vance glanced about him.

"Not a pretty sight—eh, what? And there on the davenport reclined the lady's strangled body. That corpse was Skeel's dominant horror. He staggered to the table to look at it, and steadied himself with his right hand—that's how you got your fingerprints, Sergeant. Then the realization of his own position suddenly smote him. Here he was alone with a murdered person. He was known to have been intimate with the lady; and he was a burglar with a record. Who would believe that he was innocent? And though he had probably recognized the

man who had negotiated the business, he was in no position to tell his story. Everything was against him—his sneaking in, his presence in the house at half past nine, his relations with the girl, his profession, his reputation. He hadn't a chance in the world. . . . I say, Markham, would *you* have credited his tale?"

"Never mind that," retorted Markham. "Go on with your theory." He and Heath had been listening with rapt interest.

"My theory from this point on," resumed Vance, "is what you might term self-developing. It proceeds on its own inertia, so to speak.—Skeel was confronted by the urgent problem of getting away and covering up his tracks. His mind in this emergency became keen and highly active: his life was forfeit if he didn't succeed. He began to think furiously. He could have left by the side door at once without being seen; but then, the door would have been found unbolted. And this fact, taken in connection with his earlier visit that night, would have suggested his manner of unbolting the door. . . . No, that method of escape wouldn't do—decidedly it wouldn't do. He knew he was likely, in any event, to be suspected of the murder, in view of his shady association with the lady and his general character. Motive, place, opportunity, time, means, conduct, and his own record—all were against him. Either he must cover up his tracks, don't y' know, or else his career as a Lothario was at an end. A sweet dilemma! He realized, of course, that if he could get out and leave that side door bolted on the inside, he'd be comparatively safe. No one could then explain how he

had come in or gone out. It would establish his only possible alibi—a negative one, to be sure; but, with a good lawyer, he could probably make it hold. Doubtless he searched for other means of escape, but found himself confronted with obstacles on every hand. The side door was his only hope. How could it be worked?"

Vance rose and yawned.

"That's my caressin' theory. Skeel was caught in a trap, and with his shrewd, tricky brain he figured his way out. He may have roamed up and down these two rooms for hours before he hit on his plan; and it's not unlikely that he appealed to the Deity with an occasional 'Oh, my God!' As for his using the tweezers, I'm inclined to think the mechanism of the idea came to him almost immediately.—Y' know, Sergeant, this locking of a door on the inside is an old trick. There are any number of recorded cases of it in the criminal literature of Europe. Indeed, in Professor Hans Gross's handbook of criminology there's a whole chapter on the devices used by burglars for illegal entries and exits.* But all such devices have had to do with the locking—not the bolting—of doors. The principle, of course, is the same, but the technic is different. To lock a door on the inside, a needle, or strong slender pin, is inserted through the bow of the key, and pulled downward with a string. But on the side door of this house there is no lock and key; nor is there a bow in the bolt-handle.—Now, the resourceful Skeel, while pacing nervously about, looking for something that

* The treatise referred to by Vance was *Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik.*

might offer a suggestion, probably espied the tweezers on the lady's dressing-table—no lady nowadays is without these little eyebrow-pluckers, don't y' know—and immediately his problem was solved. It remained only to test the device. Before departing, however, he chiselled open the jewel-case which the other chap had merely dinted, and found the solitaire diamond ring that he later attempted to pawn. Then he erased, as he thought, all his finger-prints, forgetting to wipe off the inside door-knob of the closet, and overlooking the hand-mark on the table. After that, he let himself out quietly, and rebolted the side door the same as I did, stuffing the tweezers in his waistcoat pocket and forgetting them."

Heath nodded his head oracularly.

"A crook, no matter how clever he is, always overlooks something."

"Why single out crooks for your criticism, Sergeant?" asked Vance lazily. "Do you know of anybody in this imperfect world who doesn't always overlook something?" He gave Heath a benignant smile. "Even the police, don't y' know, overlooked the tweezers."

Heath grunted. His cigar had gone out, and he relighted it slowly and thoroughly.

"What do you think, Mr. Markham?"

"The situation doesn't become much clearer," was Markham's gloomy comment.

"My theory isn't exactly a blindin' illumination," said Vance. "Yet I wouldn't say that it left things in pristine darkness. There are certain inferences to be drawn from my vagaries. To wit: Skeel either knew or recognized the murderer; and once he had

made good his escape from the apartment and had regained a modicum of self-confidence, he undoubtedly blackmailed his homicidal confrère. His death was merely another manifestation of our *inconnu's* bent for ridding himself of persons who annoyed him. Furthermore, my theory accounts for the chiselled jewel-case, the finger-prints, the unmolested closet, the finding of the gems in the refuse-tin—the person who took them really didn't want them, y' know—and Skeel's silence. It also explains the unbolting and bolting of the side door."

"Yes," sighed Markham. "It seems to clarify everything but the one all-important point—the identity of the murderer."

"Exactly," said Vance. "Let's go to lunch."

Heath, morose and confused, departed for Police Headquarters; and Markham, Vance, and I rode to Delmonico's, where we chose the main dining-room in preference to the grill.

"The case now would seem to centre in Cleaver and Mannix," said Markham, when we had finished our luncheon. "If your theory that the same man killed both Skeel and the Canary is correct, then Lindquist is out of it, for he certainly was in the Episcopal Hospital Saturday night."

"Quite," agreed Vance. "The doctor is unquestionably eliminated. . . . Yes; Cleaver and Mannix —they're the allurin' twins. Don't see any way to go beyond them." He frowned and sipped his coffee. "My original quartet is dwindling, and I don't like it. It narrows the thing down too much—there's no scope for the mind, as it were, in only two choices. What if we should succeed in eliminating Cleaver

and Mannix? Where would we be—eh, what? Nowhere—simply nowhere. And yet, one of the quartet is guilty; let's cling to that consolin' fact. It can't be Spotswoode and it can't be Lindquist. Cleaver and Mannix remain: two from four leaves two. Simple arithmetic, what? The only trouble is, this case isn't simple. Lord, no!—I say, how would the equation work out if we used algebra, or spherical trigonometry, or differential calculus? Let's cast it in the fourth dimension—or the fifth, or the sixth. . . ." He held his temples in both hands. "Oh, promise, Markham—promise me that you'll hire a kind, gentle keeper for me."

"I know how you feel. I've been in the same mental state for a week."

"It's the quartet idea that's driving me mad," moaned Vance. "It wrings me to have my tetrad lopped off in such brutal fashion. I'd set my young trustin' heart on that quartet, and now it's only a pair. My sense of order and proportion has been outraged. . . . I want my quartet."

"I'm afraid you'll have to be satisfied with two of them," Markham returned wearily. "One of them can't qualify, and one is in bed. You might send some flowers to the hospital, if it would cheer you any."

"One is in bed—one is in bed," repeated Vance. "Well, well—to be sure! And one from four leaves three. More arithmetic. Three! . . . On the other hand, there is no such thing as a straight line. All lines are curved; they transcribe circles in space. They look straight, but they're not. Appearances, y' know—so deceptive! . . . Let's enter the silence, and substitute mentation for sight."

He gazed up out of the great windows into Fifth Avenue. For several moments he sat smoking thoughtfully. When he spoke again, it was in an even, deliberate voice.

"Markham, would it be difficult for you to invite Mannix and Cleaver and Spotswoode to spend an evening—this evening, let us say—in your apartment?"

Markham set down his cup with a clatter, and regarded Vance narrowly.

"What new harlequinade is this?"

"Fie on you! Answer my question."

"Well—of course—I might arrange it," replied Markham hesitantly. "They're all more or less under my jurisdiction at present."

"So that such an invitation would be rather in line with the situation—eh, what? And they wouldn't be likely to refuse you, old dear—would they?"

"No; I hardly think so. . . ."

"And if, when they had assembled in your quarters, you should propose a few hands of poker, they'd probably accept, without thinking the suggestion strange?"

"Probably," said Markham, nonplussed at Vance's amazing request. "Cleaver and Spotswoode both play, I know; and Mannix doubtless knows the game. But why poker? Are you serious, or has your threatened dementia already overtaken you?"

"Oh, I'm deuced serious." Vance's tone left no doubt as to the fact. "The game of poker, d' ye see, is the crux of the matter. I knew Cleaver was an old hand at the game; and Spotswoode, of course, played

with Judge Redfern last Monday night. So that gave me a basis for my plan. Mannix, we'll assume, also plays."

He leaned forward, speaking earnestly.

"Nine-tenths of poker, Markham, is psychology; and if one understands the game, one can learn more of a man's inner nature at a poker table in an hour than during a year's casual association with him. You rallied me once when I said I could lead you to the perpetrator of any crime by examining the factors of the crime itself. But naturally I must know the man to whom I am to lead you; otherwise I cannot relate the psychological indications of the crime to the culprit's nature. In the present case, I know the kind of man who committed the crime; but I am not sufficiently acquainted with the suspects to point out the guilty one. However, after our game of poker, I hope to be able to tell you who planned and carried out the Canary's murder." *

Markham gazed at him in blank astonishment. He knew that Vance played poker with amazing skill, and that he possessed an uncanny knowledge of the psychological elements involved in the game; but

* Recently I ran across an article by Doctor George A. Dorsey, professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, and author of "Why We Behave Like Human Beings," which bore intimate testimony to the scientific accuracy of Vance's theory. In it Doctor Dorsey said: "Poker is a cross-section of life. The way a man behaves in a poker game is the way he behaves in life. . . . His success or failure lies in the way his physical organism responds to the stimuli supplied by the game. . . . I have studied humanity all my life from the anthropologic and psychological view-point. And I have yet to find a better laboratory exercise than to observe the manners of men as they see my raise and come back at me. . . . The psychologist's verbalized, visceral, and manual behaviors are functioning at their highest in a poker game. . . . I can truthfully say that I learned about men from poker."

he was unprepared for the latter's statement that he might be able to solve the Odell murder by means of it. Yet Vance had spoken with such undoubted earnestness that Markham was impressed. I knew what was passing in his mind almost as well as if he had voiced his thoughts. He was recalling the way in which Vance had, in a former murder case, put his finger unerringly on the guilty man by a similar process of psychological deduction. And he was also telling himself that, however incomprehensible and seemingly extravagant Vance's requests were, there was always a fundamentally sound reason behind them.

"Damn it!" he muttered at last. "The whole scheme seems idiotic. . . . And yet, if you really want a game of poker with these men, I've no special objection. It'll get you nowhere—I'll tell you that beforehand. It's stark nonsense to suppose that you can find the guilty man by such fantastic means."

"Ah, well," sighed Vance, "a little futile recreation will do us no harm."

"But why do you include Spotswoode?"

"Really, y' know, I haven't the slightest notion —except, of course, that he's one of my quartet. And we'll need an extra hand."

"Well, don't tell me afterwards that I'm to lock him up for murder. I'd have to draw the line. Strange as it may seem to your layman's mind, I wouldn't care to prosecute a man, knowing that it was physically impossible for him to have committed the crime."

"As to that," drawled Vance, "the only obstacles that stand in the way of physical impossibilities are

material facts. And material facts are notoriously deceivin'. Really, y' know, you lawyers would do better if you ignored them entirely."

Markham did not deign to answer such heresy, but the look he gave Vance was most expressive.

CHAPTER XXVII

A GAME OF POKER

(Monday, September 17; 9 p. m.)

Vance and I went home after lunch, and at about four o'clock Markham telephoned to say that he had made the necessary arrangements for the evening with Spotswoode, Mannix, and Cleaver. Immediately following this confirmation Vance left the house, and did not return until nearly eight o'clock. Though I was filled with curiosity at so unusual a proceeding, he refused to enlighten me. But when, at a quarter to nine, we went down-stairs to the waiting car, there was a man I did not know in the tonneau; and I at once connected him with Vance's mysterious absence.

"I've asked Mr. Allen to join us to-night," Vance vouchsafed, when he had introduced us. "You don't play poker, and we really need another hand to make the game interestin', y' know. Mr. Allen, by the bye, is an old antagonist of mine."

The fact that Vance would, apparently without permission, bring an uninvited guest to Markham's apartment amazed me but little more than the appearance of the man himself. He was rather short, with sharp, shrewd features; and what I saw of his hair beneath his jauntily tipped hat was black and sleek, like the painted hair on Japanese dolls. I noted, too, that his evening tie was enlivened by a

design of tiny white forget-me-nots, and that his shirt-front was adorned with diamond studs.

The contrast between him and the immaculately stylish and meticulously correct Vance was aggressively evident. I wondered what could be the relationship between them. Obviously it was neither social nor intellectual.

Cleaver and Mannix were already on hand when we were ushered into Markham's drawing-room, and a few minutes later Spotswoode arrived. The amenities of introduction over, we were soon seated comfortably about the open log fire, smoking, and sipping very excellent Scotch high-balls. Markham had, of course, accepted the unexpected Mr. Allen cordially, but his occasional glances in the latter's direction told me he was having some difficulty in reconciling the man's appearance with Vance's sponsorship.

A tense atmosphere lay beneath the spurious and affected affability of the little gathering. Indeed, the situation was scarcely conducive to spontaneity. Here were three men each of whom was known to the others to have been interested in the same woman; and the reason for their having been brought together was the fact that this woman had been murdered. Markham, however, handled the situation with such tact that he largely succeeded in giving each one the feeling of being a disinterested spectator summoned to discuss an abstract problem. He explained at the outset that the "conference" had been actuated by his failure to find any approach to the problem of the murder. He hoped, he said, by a purely informal discussion, divested

of all officialism and coercion, to turn up some suggestion that might lead to a fruitful line of inquiry. His manner was one of friendly appeal, and when he finished speaking the general tension had been noticeably relaxed.

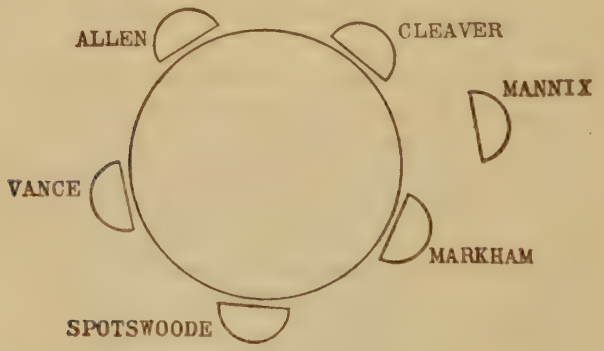
During the discussion that followed I was interested in the various attitudes of the men concerned. Cleaver spoke bitterly of his part in the affair, and was more self-condemnatory than suggestive. Mannix was voluble and pretentiously candid, but beneath his comments ran a strain of apologetic wariness. Spotswoode, unlike Mannix, seemed loath to discuss the matter, and maintained a consistently reticent attitude. He responded politely to Markham's questions, but he did not succeed entirely in hiding his resentment at thus being dragged into a general discussion. Vance had little to say, limiting himself to occasional remarks directed always to Markham. Allen did not once speak, but sat contemplating the others with a sort of canny amusement.

The entire conversation struck me as utterly futile. Had Markham really hoped to garner information from it, he would have been woefully disappointed. I realized, though, that he was merely endeavoring to justify himself for having taken so unusual a step, and to pave the way for the game of poker which Vance had requested. When the time came to broach the subject, however, there was no difficulty about it.

It was exactly eleven o'clock when he made the suggestion. His tone was gracious and unassuming; but by couching his invitation in terms of a

personal request, he practically precluded declination. But his verbal strategy, I felt, was unnecessary. Both Cleaver and Spotswoode seemed genuinely to welcome the opportunity of dropping a distasteful discussion in favor of playing cards; and Vance and Allen, of course, concurred instantly. Mannix alone declined. He explained that he knew the game only slightly, and disliked it; though he expressed an enthusiastic desire to watch the others. Vance urged him to reconsider, but without success; and Markham finally ordered his man to arrange the table for five.

I noticed that Vance waited until Allen had taken his place, and then dropped into the chair at his right. Cleaver took the seat at Allen's left. Spotswoode sat at Vance's right; and then came Markham. Mannix drew up his chair midway behind Markham and Cleaver. Thus:



Cleaver first named a rather moderate limit, but Spotswoode at once suggested much larger stakes.

Then Vance went still higher, and as both Markham and Allen signified their agreement, his figure was accepted. The prices placed on the chips somewhat took my breath away, and even Mannix whistled softly.

That all five men at the table were excellent players became obvious before the game had progressed ten minutes. For the first time that night Vance's friend Allen seemed to have found his *milieu* and to be wholly at ease.

Allen won the first two hands, and Vance the third and fourth. Spotswoode then had a short run of good luck, and a little later Markham took a large jack-pot which put him slightly in the lead. Cleaver was the only loser thus far; but in another half-hour he had succeeded in recovering a large portion of his losses. After that Vance forged steadily ahead, only to relinquish his winning streak to Allen. Then for a while the fortunes of the game were rather evenly distributed. But later on both Cleaver and Spotswoode began to lose heavily. By half past twelve a grim atmosphere had settled over the party; for so high were the stakes, and so rapidly did the betting pyramid, that even for men of means—such as all these players undoubtedly were—the amounts which continually changed hands represented very considerable items.

Just before one o'clock, when the fever of the game had reached a high point, I saw Vance glance quickly at Allen and pass his handkerchief across his forehead. To a stranger the gesture would have appeared perfectly natural; but, so familiar was I with Vance's mannerisms, I immediately recognized

its artificiality. And simultaneously I noticed that it was Allen who was shuffling the cards preparatory to dealing. Some smoke from his cigar evidently went into his eye at this moment, for he blinked, and one of the cards fell to the floor. Quickly retrieving it, he reshuffled the deck and placed it before Vance to cut.

The hand was a jack-pot, and there was a small fortune in chips already on the table. Cleaver, Markham, and Spotswoode passed. The decision thus reached Vance, and he opened for an unusually large amount. Allen at once laid down his hand, but Cleaver stayed. Then Markham and Spotswoode both dropped out, leaving the entire play between Vance and Cleaver. Cleaver drew one card, and Vance, who had opened, drew two. Vance made a nominal wager, and Cleaver raised it substantially. Vance in turn raised Cleaver, but only for a small amount; and Cleaver again raised Vance—this time for an even larger sum than before. Vance hesitated, and called him. Cleaver exposed his hand triumphantly.

"Straight flush—jack high," he announced. "Can you beat that?"

"Not on a two-card draw," said Vance ruefully. He put his cards down to show his openers. He had four kings.

About half an hour later Vance again took out his handkerchief and passed it across his forehead. As before, I noted that it was Allen's deal, and also that the hand was a jack-pot which had been twice sweetened. Allen paused to take a drink of his highball and to light his cigar. Then, after Vance had cut the cards, he dealt them.

Cleaver, Markham, and Spotswoode passed, and again Vance opened, for the full amount of the pot. No one stayed except Spotswoode; and this time it was a struggle solely between him and Vance. Spotswoode asked for one card; and Vance stood pat. Then there followed a moment of almost breathless silence. The atmosphere seemed to me to be electrically charged, and I think the others sensed it too, for they were watching the play with a curiously strained intentness. Vance and Spotswoode, however, appeared frozen in attitudes of superlative calm. I watched them closely, but neither revealed the slightest indication of any emotion.

It was Vance's first bet. Without speaking he moved a stack of yellow chips to the centre of the table—it was by far the largest wager that had been made during the game. But immediately Spotswoode measured another stack alongside of it. Then he coolly and deftly counted the remainder of his chips, and pushed them all forward with the palm of his hand, saying quietly:

"The limit."

Vance shrugged almost imperceptibly.

"The pot, sir, is yours." He smiled pleasantly at Spotswoode, and put down his hand face up, to establish his openers. He had held four aces!

"Gad! That's poker!" exclaimed Allen, chuckling.

"Poker?" echoed Markham. "To lay down four aces with all that money at stake?"

Cleaver also grunted his astonishment, and Mannix pursed his lips disgustedly.

"I don't mean any offense, y' understand, Mr. Vance," he said. "But looking at that play from a

strictly business standpoint, I'd say you quit too soon."

Spotswoode glanced up.

"You gentlemen wrong Mr. Vance," he said. "He played his hand perfectly. His withdrawal, even with four aces, was scientifically correct."

"Sure it was," agreed Allen. "Oh, boy! What a battle that was!"

Spotswoode nodded and, turning to Vance, said: "Since the exact situation is never likely to occur again, the least I can do, by way of showing my appreciation of your remarkable perception, is to gratify your curiosity.—I held nothing."

Spotswoode put down his hand and extended his fingers gracefully toward the upturned cards. There were revealed a five, six, seven, and eight of clubs, and a knave of hearts.

"I can't say that I follow your reasoning, Mr. Spotswoode," Markham confessed. "Mr. Vance had you beaten—and he quit."

"Consider the situation," Spotswoode replied, in a suave, even voice. "I most certainly would have opened so rich a pot, had I been able to, after Mr. Cleaver and you had passed. But since I nevertheless stayed after Mr. Vance had opened for so large an amount, it goes without saying that I must have had either a four-straight, a four-flush, or a four-straight-flush. I believe I may state without immodesty that I am too good a player to have stayed otherwise. . . ."

"And I assure you, Markham," interrupted Vance, "that Mr. Spotswoode is too good a player to have stayed unless he had actually had a four-

straight-flush. That is the only hand he would have been justified in backing at the betting odds of two to one.—You see, I had opened for the amount in the pot, and Mr. Spotswoode had to put up half the amount of the money on the table in order to stay —making it a two-to-one bet.—Now, these odds are not high, and any non-opening hand smaller than a four-straight-flush would not have warranted the risk. As it was, he had, with a one-card draw, two chances in forty-seven of making a straight-flush, nine chances in forty-seven of making a flush, and eight chances in forty-seven of making a straight; so that he had nineteen chances in forty-seven—or more than one chance in three—of strengthening his hand into either a straight-flush, a flush, or a straight."

"Exactly," assented Spotswoode. "However, after I had drawn my one card, the only possible question in Mr. Vance's mind was whether or not I had made my straight-flush. If I had not made it—or had merely drawn a straight or a flush—Mr. Vance figured, and figured rightly, that I would not have seen his large bet and also have raised it the limit. To have done so, in those circumstances, would have been irrational poker. Not one player in a thousand would have taken such a risk on a mere bluff. Therefore, had Mr. Vance not laid down his four aces when I raised him, he would have been foolhardy in the extreme. It turned out, of course, that I was actually bluffing; but that does not alter the fact that the correct and logical thing was for Mr. Vance to quit."

"Quite true," Vance agreed. "As Mr. Spotswoode says, not one player in a thousand would have

wagered the limit without having filled his straight-flush, knowing I had a pat hand. Indeed, one might almost say that Mr. Spotswoode, by doing so, has added another decimal point to the psychological subtleties of the game; for, as you see, he analyzed my reasoning, and carried his own reasoning a step further."

Spotswoode acknowledged the compliment with a slight bow; and Cleaver reached for the cards and began to shuffle them. But the tension had been broken, and the game was not resumed.

Something, however, seemed to have gone wrong with Vance. For a long while he sat frowning at his cigarette and sipping his high-ball in troubled abstraction. At last he rose and walked to the mantel, where he stood studying a Cézanne water-color he had given Markham years before. His action was a typical indication of his inner puzzlement.

Presently, when there came a lull in the conversation, he turned sharply and looked at Mannix.

"I say, Mr. Mannix"—he spoke with only casual curiosity—"how does it happen you've never acquired a taste for poker? All good business men are gamblers at heart."

"Sure they are," Mannix replied, with pensive deliberation. "But poker, now, isn't my idea of gambling—positively not. It's got too much science. And it ain't quick enough for me—it hasn't got the kick in it, if you know what I mean. Roulette's my speed. When I was in Monte Carlo last summer I dropped more money in ten minutes than you gentlemen lost here this whole evening. But I got action for my money."

"I take it, then, you don't care for cards at all."

"Not to play games with." Mannix had become expansive. "I don't mind betting money on the draw of a card, for instance. But no two out of three, y' understand. I want my pleasures to come rapid." And he snapped his thick fingers several times in quick succession to demonstrate the rapidity with which he desired to have his pleasures come.

Vance sauntered to the table and carelessly picked up a deck of cards.

"What do you say to cutting once for a thousand dollars?"

Mannix rose instantly.

"You're on!"

Vance handed the cards over, and Mannix shuffled them. Then he put them down and cut. He turned up a ten. Vance cut, and showed a king.

"A thousand I owe you," said Mannix, with no more concern than if it had been ten cents.

Vance waited without speaking, and Mannix eyed him craftily.

"I'll cut with you again—two thousand this time. Yes?"

Vance raised his eyebrows. "Double? . . . By all means." He shuffled the cards, and cut a seven.

Mannix's hand swooped down and turned a five.

"Well, that's three thousand I owe you," he said. His little eyes had now narrowed into slits, and he held his cigar clamped tightly between his teeth.

"Like to double it again—eh, what?" Vance asked. "Four thousand this time?"

Markham looked at Vance in amazement, and over Allen's face there came an expression of almost

ludicrous consternation. Every one present, I believe, was astonished at the offer, for obviously Vance knew that he was giving Mannix tremendous odds by permitting successive doubling. In the end he was sure to lose. I believe Markham would have protested if at that moment Mannix had not snatched the cards from the table and begun to shuffle them.

"Four thousand it is!" he announced, putting down the deck and cutting. He turned up the queen of diamonds. "You can't beat that lady—positively not!" He was suddenly jovial.

"I fancy you're right," murmured Vance; and he cut a trey.

"Want some more?" asked Mannix, with good-natured aggressiveness.

"That's enough." Vance seemed bored. "Far too excitin'. I haven't your rugged constitution, don't y' know."

He went to the desk and made out a check to Mannix for a thousand dollars. Then he turned to Markham and held out his hand.

"Had a jolly evening and all that sort of thing. . . . And, don't forget: we lunch together to-morrow. One o'clock at the club, what?"

Markham hesitated. "If nothing interferes."

"But really, y' know, it mustn't," insisted Vance. "You've no idea how eager you are to see me."

He was unusually silent and thoughtful during the ride home. Not one explanatory word could I get out of him. But when he bade me good night he said:

"There's a vital part of the puzzle still missing, and until it's found none of it has any meaning."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GUILTY MAN

(*Tuesday, September 18; 1 p. m.*)

Vance slept late the following morning, and spent the hour or so before lunch checking a catalogue of ceramics which were to be auctioned next day at the Anderson Galleries. At one o'clock we entered the Stuyvesant Club and joined Markham in the grill.

"The lunch is on you, old thing," said Vance. "But I'll make it easy. All I want is a rasher of English bacon, a cup of coffee, and a *croissant*."

Markham gave him a mocking smile.

"I don't wonder you're economizing after your bad luck of last night."

Vance's eyebrows went up.

"I rather fancied my luck was most extr'ordin'ry."

"You held four of a kind twice, and lost both hands."

"But, y' see," blandly confessed Vance, "I happened to know both times exactly what cards my opponents held."

Markham stared at him in amazement.

"Quite so," Vance assured him. "I had arranged before the game, d' ye see, to have those particular hands dealt." He smiled benignly. "I can't tell you, old chap, how I admire your delicacy in not referring to my rather unique guest, Mr. Allen, whom I had

the bad taste to introduce so unceremoniously into your party. I owe you an explanation and an apology. Mr. Allen is not what one would call a charming companion. He is deficient in the patrician elegancies, and his display of jewellery was a bit vulgar—though I infinitely preferred his diamond studs to his piebald tie. But Mr. Allen has his points—decidedly he has his points. He ranks with Andy Blakely, Canfield, and Honest John Kelly as an indoor soldier of fortune. In fact, our Mr. Allen is none other than Doc Wiley Allen, of fragrant memory."

"Doc Allen! Not the notorious old crook who ran the Eldorado Club?"

"The same. And, incidentally, one of the cleverest card manipulators in a once lucrative but shady profession."

"You mean this fellow Allen stacked the cards last night?" Markham was indignant.

"Only for the two hands you mentioned. Allen, if you happen to remember, was the dealer both times. I, who purposely sat on his right, was careful to cut the cards in accordance with his instructions. And you really must admit that no stricture can possibly attach to my deception, inasmuch as the only beneficiaries of Allen's manipulations were Cleaver and Spotswoode. Although Allen did deal me four of a kind on each occasion, I lost heavily both times."

Markham regarded Vance for a moment in puzzled silence, and then laughed good-naturedly.

"You appear to have been in a philanthropic mood last night. You practically gave Mannix a thousand

dollars by permitting him to double the stakes on each draw. A rather quixotic procedure, I should say."

"It all depends on one's point of view, don't y' know. Despite my financial losses—which, by the bye, I have every intention of charging up to your office budget—the game was most successful. . . . Y' see, I attained the main object of my evening's entertainment."

"Oh, I remember!" said Markham vaguely, as if the matter, being of slight importance, had for the moment eluded his memory. "I believe you were going to ascertain who murdered the Odell girl."

"Amazin' memory! . . . Yes, I let fall the hint that I might be able to clarify the situation to-day."

"And whom am I to arrest?"

Vance took a drink of coffee and slowly lit a cigarette.

"I'm quite convinced, y' know, that you won't believe me," he returned, in an even, matter-of-fact voice. "But it was Spotswoode who killed the girl."

"You don't tell me!" Markham spoke with undisguised irony. "So it was Spotswoode! My dear Vance, you positively bowl me over. I would telephone Heath at once to polish up his handcuffs, but, unfortunately, miracles—such as strangling persons from across town—are not recognized possibilities in this day and age. . . . Do let me order you another *croissant*."

Vance extended his hands in a theatrical gesture of exasperated despair.

"For an educated, civilized man, Markham, there's something downright primitive about the way you

cling to optical illusions. I say, y' know, you're exactly like an infant who really believes that the magician generates a rabbit in a silk hat, simply because he sees it done."

"Now you're becoming insulting."

"Rather!" Vance pleasantly agreed. "But something drastic must be done to disentangle you from the Lorelei of legal facts. You're so deficient in imagination, old thing."

"I take it that you would have me close my eyes and picture Spotswoode sitting up-stairs here in the Stuyvesant Club and extending his arms to 71st Street. But I simply couldn't do it. I'm a commonplace chap. Such a vision would strike me as ludicrous; it would smack of a hasheesh dream. . . . You yourself don't use *Cannabis indica*, do you?"

"Put that way, the idea does sound a bit supernatural. And yet: *Certum est quia impossibile est.* I rather like that maxim, don't y' know; for, in the present case, the impossible is true. Oh, Spotswoode's guilty—no doubt about it. And I'm going to cling tenaciously to that apparent hallucination. Moreover, I'm going to try to lure you into its toils; for your own—as we absurdly say—good name is at stake. As it happens, Markham, you are at this moment shielding the real murderer from publicity."

Vance had spoken with the easy assurance that precludes argument; and from the altered expression on Markham's face I could see he was moved.

"Tell me," he said, "how you arrived at your fantastic belief in Spotswoode's guilt."

Vance crushed out his cigarette and folded his arms on the table.

"We begin with my quartet of possibilities—Mannix, Cleaver, Lindquist, and Spotswoode. Realizing, as I did, that the crime was carefully planned with the sole object of murder, I knew that only some one hopelessly ensnared in the lady's net could have done it. And no suitor outside of my quartet could have been thus enmeshed, or we would have learned of him. Therefore, one of the four was guilty. Now, Lindquist was eliminated when we found out that he was bedridden in a hospital at the time of Skeel's murder; for obviously the same person committed both crimes——"

"But," interrupted Markham, "Spotswoode had an equally good alibi for the night of the Canary's murder. Why eliminate one and not the other?"

"Sorry, but I can't agree with you. Being prostrated at a known place surrounded by incorruptible and disinterested witnesses, both preceding and during an event, is one thing; but being actually on the ground, as Spotswoode was that fatal evening, within a few minutes of the time the lady was murdered, and then being alone in a taxicab for fifteen minutes or so following the event—that is another thing. No one, as far as we know, actually saw the lady alive after Spotswoode took his departure."

"But the proof of her having been alive and spoken to him is incontestable."

"Granted. I admit that a dead woman doesn't scream and call for help, and then converse with her murderer."

"I see." Markham spoke with sarcasm. "You think it was Skeel, disguising his voice."

"Lord no! What a priceless notion! Skeel didn't

want any one to know he was there. Why should he have staged such a masterpiece of idiocy? That certainly isn't the explanation. When we find the answer it will be reasonable and simple."

"That's encouraging," smiled Markham. "But proceed with your reasons for Spotswoode's guilt."

"Three of my quartet, then, were potential murderers," Vance resumed. "Accordingly, I requested an evening of social relaxation, that I might put them under the psychological microscope, as it were. Although Spotswoode's ancestry was wholly consistent with his having been the guilty one, nevertheless I confess I thought that Cleaver or Mannix had committed the crime; for, by their own statements, either of them could have done it without contradicting any of the known circumstances of the situation. Therefore, when Mannix declined your invitation to play poker last night, I put Cleaver to the first test. I wig-wagged to Mr. Allen, and he straightway proceeded to perform his first feat of prestidigitation."

Vance paused and looked up.

"You perhaps recall the circumstances? It was a jack-pot. Allen dealt Cleaver a four-straight-flush and gave me three kings. The other hands were so poor that every one else was compelled to drop out. I opened; and Cleaver stayed. On the draw, Allen gave me another king, and gave Cleaver the card he needed to complete his straight-flush. Twice I bet a small amount, and each time Cleaver raised me. Finally I called him, and, of course, he won. He couldn't help but win, d' ye see. He was betting on a sure-thing. Since I opened the pot and drew two

cards, the highest hand I could possibly have held would have been four of a kind. Cleaver knew this, and having a straight-flush, he also knew, before he raised my bet, that he had me beaten. At once I realized that he was not the man I was after."

"By what reasoning?"

"A poker-player, Markham, who would bet on a sure-thing is one who lacks the egotistical self-confidence of the highly subtle and supremely capable gambler. He is not a man who will take hazardous chances and tremendous risks, for he possesses, to some degree, what the psychoanalysts call an inferiority complex, and instinctively he grasps at every possible opportunity of protecting and bettering himself. In short, he is not the ultimate, unadulterated gambler. And the man who killed the Odell girl was a supreme gambler who would stake everything on a single turn of the wheel, for, in killing her, that is exactly what he did. And only a gambler whose paramount self-confidence would make him scorn, through sheer egotism, to bet on a sure-thing, could have committed such a crime.—Therefore, Cleaver was eliminated as a suspect."

Markham was now listening intently.

"The test to which I put Spotswoode a little later," Vance went on, "had originally been intended for Mannix, but he was out of the game. That didn't matter, however, for, had I been able to eliminate both Cleaver and Spotswoode, then Mannix would undoubtedly have been the guilty man. Of course I would have planned something else to substantiate the fact; but, as it was, that wasn't necess'ry. . . . The test I applied to Spots-

woode was pretty well explained by the gentleman himself. As he said, not one player in a thousand would have wagered the limit against a pat hand, when he himself held nothing. It was tremendous —superb! It was probably the most remarkable bluff ever made in a game of poker. I couldn't help admiring him when he calmly shoved forward all his chips, knowing, as I did, that he held nothing. He staked everything, d' ye see, wholly on his conviction that he could follow my reasoning step by step and, in the last analysis, outwit me. It took courage and daring to do that. And it also took a degree of self-confidence which would never have permitted him to bet on a sure-thing. The psychological principles involved in that hand were identical with those of the Odell crime. I threatened Spotswoode with a powerful hand—a pat hand —just as the girl, no doubt, threatened him; and instead of compromising—instead of calling me or laying down—he outreached me; he resorted to one supreme *coup*, though it meant risking everything. . . . My word, Markham! Can't you see how the man's character, as revealed in that amazing gesture, dovetails with the psychology of the crime?"

Markham was silent for a while; he appeared to be pondering the matter.

"But you yourself, Vance, were not satisfied at the time," he submitted at length. "In fact, you looked doubtful and worried."

"True, old dear. I was no end worried. The psychological proof of Spotswoode's guilt came so dashed unexpectedly—I wasn't looking for it, don't y' know. After eliminating Cleaver I had a *parti pris*,

so to speak, in regard to Mannix; for all the material evidence in favor of Spotswoode's innocence —that is, the seeming physical impossibility of his having strangled the lady—had, I admit, impressed me. I'm not perfect, don't y' know. Being unfortunately human, I'm still susceptible to the malicious animal magnetism about facts and appearances, which you lawyer chaps are continuously exuding over the earth like some vast asphyxiating effluvium. And even when I found that Spotswoode's psychological nature fitted perfectly with all the factors of the crime, I still harbored a doubt in regard to Mannix. It was barely possible that he would have played the hand just as Spotswoode played it. That is why, after the game was over, I tackled him on the subject of gambling. I wanted to check his psychological reactions."

"Still, he staked everything on one turn of the wheel, as you put it."

"Ah! But not in the same sense that Spotswoode did. Mannix is a cautious and timid gambler as compared with Spotswoode. To begin with, he had an equal chance and an even bet, whereas Spotswoode had no chance at all—his hand was worthless. And yet Spotswoode wagered the limit on a pure bit of mental calculation. That was gambling in the higher ether. On the other hand, Mannix was merely tossing a coin, with an even chance of winning. Furthermore, no calculation of any kind entered into it; there was no planning, no figuring, no daring. And, as I have told you from the start, the Odell murder was premeditated and carefully worked out with shrewd calculation and supreme

daring. . . . And what true gambler would ask an adversary to double a bet on the second flip of the coin, and then accept an offer to redouble on the third flip? I purposely tested Mannix in that way, so as to preclude any possibility of error. Thus I not only eliminated him—I expunged him, eradicated him, wiped him out utterly. It cost me a thousand dollars, but it purged my mind of any lingering doubt. I then knew, despite all the contr'ry material indications, that Spotswoode had done away with the lady."

"You make your case theoretically plausible. But, practically, I'm afraid I can't accept it." Markham was more impressed, I felt, than he cared to admit. "Damn it, man!" he exploded after a moment. "Your conclusion demolishes all the established landmarks of rationality and sane credibility. —Just consider the facts." He had now reached the argumentative stage of his doubt. "You say Spotswoode is guilty. Yet we know, on irrefutable evidence, that five minutes after he came out of the apartment the girl screamed and called for help. He was standing by the switchboard, and, accompanied by Jessup, he went to the door and carried on a brief conversation with her. She was certainly alive then. Then he went out the front door, entered a taxicab, and drove away. Fifteen minutes later he was joined by Judge Redfern as he alighted from the taxicab in front of the club here—nearly forty blocks away from the apartment-house! It would have been impossible for him to have made the trip in less time; and, moreover, we have the chauffeur's record. Spotswoode simply did not have either the

opportunity or the time to commit the murder between half past eleven and ten minutes of twelve when Judge Redfern met him. And, remember, he played poker in the club here until three in the morning—hours after the murder took place."

Markham shook his head with emphasis.

"Vance, there's no human way to get round those facts. They're firmly established; and they preclude Spotswoode's guilt as effectively and finally as though he had been at the North Pole that night."

Vance was unmoved.

"I admit everything you say," he rejoined. "But as I have stated before, when material facts and psychological facts conflict, the material facts are wrong. In this case, they may not actually be wrong, but they're deceptive."

"Very well, *magnus Apollo!*" The situation was too much for Markham's exacerbated nerves. "Show me how Spotswoode could have strangled the girl and ransacked the apartment, and I'll order Heath to arrest him."

"'Pon my word, I can't do it," expostulated Vance. "Omniscience was denied me. But—deuce take it!—I think I've done rather well in pointing out the culprit. I never agreed to expound his technic, don't y' know."

"So! Your vaunted penetration amounts only to that, does it? Well, well! Here and now I become a professor of the higher mental sciences, and I pronounce solemnly that Doctor Crippen murdered the Odell girl. To be sure, Crippen's dead; but that fact doesn't interfere with my newly adopted psychological means of deduction. Crippen's nature, you

see, fits perfectly with all the esoteric and recondite indications of the crime. To-morrow I'll apply for an order of exhumation."

Vance looked at him with waggish reproachfulness, and sighed.

"Recognition of my transcendent genius, I see, is destined to be posthumous. *Omnia post obitum fingit majora vetustas.* In the meantime I bear the taunts and jeers of the multitude with a stout heart. My head is bloody, but unbowed."

He looked at his watch, and then seemed to become absorbed with some line of thought.

"Markham," he said, after several minutes, "I've a concert at three o'clock, but there's an hour to spare. I want to take another look at that apartment and its various approaches. Spotswoode's trick—and I'm convinced it was nothing more than a trick—was enacted there; and if we are ever to find the explanation, we shall have to look for it on the scene."

I had got the impression that Markham, despite his emphatic denial of the possibility of Spotswoode's guilt, was not entirely unconvinced. Therefore, I was not surprised when, with only a half-hearted protest, he assented to Vance's proposal to revisit the Odell apartment.

CHAPTER XXIX

BEETHOVEN'S "ANDANTE"

(Tuesday, September 18; 2 p. m.)

Less than half an hour later we again entered the main hall of the little apartment building in 71st Street. Spively, as usual, was on duty at the switchboard. Just inside the public reception-room the officer on guard reclined in an easy chair, a cigar in his mouth. On seeing the District Attorney, he rose with forced alacrity.

"When you going to open things up, Mr. Markham?" he asked. "This rest-cure is ruinin' my health."

"Very soon, I hope, officer," Markham told him. "Any more visitors?"

"Nobody, sir." The man stifled a yawn.

"Let's have your key to the apartment.—Have you been inside?"

"No, sir. Orders were to stay out here."

We passed into the dead girl's living-room. The shades were still up, and the sunlight of midday was pouring in. Nothing apparently had been touched: not even the overturned chairs had been righted. Markham went to the window and stood, his hands behind him, surveying the scene despondently. He was laboring under a growing uncertainty, and he watched Vance with a cynical amusement which was far from spontaneous.

Vance, after lighting a cigarette, proceeded to inspect the two rooms, letting his eyes rest searchingly on the various disordered objects. Presently he went into the bathroom and remained several minutes. When he came out he carried a towel with several dark smudges on it.

"This is what Skeel used to erase his finger-prints," he said, tossing the towel on the bed.

"Marvellous!" Markham rallied him. "That, of course, convicts Spotswoode."

"Tut, tut! But it helps substantiate my theory of the crime." He walked to the dressing-table and sniffed at a tiny silver atomizer. "The lady used Coty's *Chypre*," he murmured. "Why *will* they all do it?"

"And just what does that help substantiate?"

"Markham dear, I'm absorbing atmosphere. I'm attuning my soul to the apartment's vibrations. Do let me attune in peace. I may have a visitation at any moment—a revelation from Sinai, as it were."

He continued his round of investigation, and at last passed out into the main hall, where he stood, one foot holding open the door, looking about him with curious intentness. When he returned to the living-room, he sat down on the edge of the rosewood table, and surrendered himself to gloomy contemplation. After several minutes he gave Markham a sardonic grin.

"I say! This *is* a problem. Dash it all, it's uncanny!"

"I had an idea," scoffed Markham, "that sooner or later you'd revise your deductions in regard to Spotswoode."

Vance stared idly at the ceiling.

"You're devilish stubborn, don't y' know. Here I am trying to extricate you from a deuced unpleasant predicament, and all you do is to indulge in caustic observations calculated to damp my youthful ardor."

Markham left the window and seated himself on the arm of the davenport facing Vance. His eyes held a worried look.

"Vance, don't get me wrong. Spotswoode means nothing in my life. If he did this thing, I'd like to know it. Unless this case is cleared up, I'm in for an ungodly walloping by the newspapers. It's not to my interests to discourage any possibility of a solution. But your conclusion about Spotswoode is impossible. There are too many contradictory facts."

"That's just it, don't y' know. The contradict'ry indications are far too perfect. They fit together too beautifully; they're almost as fine as the forms in a Michelangelo statue. They're too carefully co-ordinated, d' ye see, to have been merely a haphazard concatenation of circumstances. They signify conscious design."

Markham rose and, slowly returning to the window, stood looking out into the little rear yard.

"If I could grant your premise that Spotswoode killed the girl," he said, "I could follow your syllogism. But I can't very well convict a man on the grounds that his defense is too perfect."

"What we need, Markham, is inspiration. The mere contortions of the sibyl are not enough." Vance took a turn up and down the room. "What really infuriates me is that I've been outwitted.

And by a manufacturer of automobile access'ries! . . . It's most humiliatin'."

He sat down at the piano and played the opening bars of Brahms's *Capriccio* No. 1.

"Needs tuning," he muttered; and, sauntering to the Boule cabinet, he ran his finger over the marquetry. "Pretty and all that," he said, "but a bit fussy. Good example, though. The deceased's aunt from Seattle should get a very fair price for it." He regarded a pendent girandole at the side of the cabinet. "Rather nice, that, if the original candles hadn't been supplanted with modern frosted bulbs." He paused before the little china clock on the mantel. "Gingerbread. I'm sure it kept atrocious time." Passing on to the escritoire, he examined it critically. "Imitation French Renaissance. But rather dainty, what?" Then his eye fell on the waste-paper basket, and he picked it up. "Silly idea," he commented, "—making a basket out of vellum. The artistic triumph of some lady interior decorator, I'll wager. Enough vellum here to bind a set of Epictetus. But why ruin the effect with hand-painted garlands? The æsthetic instinct has not as yet invaded these fair States—decidedly not."

Setting the basket down, he studied it meditatively for a moment. Then he leaned over and took from it the piece of crumpled wrapping-paper to which he had referred the previous day.

"This doubtless contained the lady's last purchase on earth," he mused. "Very touchin'. Are you sentimental about such trifles, Markham? Anyway, the purple string round it was a godsend to Skeel. . . . What knickknack, do you suppose, paved the way for the frantic Tony's escape?"

He opened the paper, revealing a broken piece of corrugated cardboard and a large square dark-brown envelope.

"Ah, to be sure! Phonograph records." He glanced about the apartment. "But, I say, where did the lady keep the bally machine?"

"You'll find it in the foyer," said Markham wearily, without turning. He knew that Vance's chatter was only the outward manifestation of serious and perplexed thinking; and he was waiting with what patience he could muster.

Vance sauntered idly through the glass doors into the little reception-hall, and stood gazing abstractedly at a console phonograph of Chinese Chippendale design which stood against the wall at one end. The squat cabinet was partly covered with a prayer-rug, and upon it sat a polished bronze flower-bowl.

"At any rate, it doesn't look phonographic," he remarked. "But why the prayer-rug?" He examined it casually. "Anatolian—probably called a Cæsarian for sale purposes. Not very valuable—too much on the Oushak type. . . . Wonder what the lady's taste in music was. Victor Herbert, doubtless." He turned back the rug and lifted the lid of the cabinet. There was a record already on the machine, and he leaned over and looked at it.

"My word! The *Andante* from Beethoven's C-Minor Symphony!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "You know the movement, of course, Markham. The most perfect *Andante* ever written." He wound up the machine. "I think a little good music might clear the atmosphere and volatilize our perturbation, what?"

Markham paid no attention to his banter; he was still gazing dejectedly out of the window.

Vance started the motor, and placing the needle on the record, returned to the living-room. He stood staring at the davenport, concentrating on the problem in hand. I sat in the wicker chair by the door waiting for the music. The situation was getting on my nerves, and I began to feel fidgety. A minute or two passed, but the only sound which came from the phonograph was a faint scratching. Vance looked up with mild curiosity, and walked back to the machine. Inspecting it cursorily, he once more set it in operation. But though he waited several minutes, no music came forth.

"I say! That's deuced queer, y' know," he grumbled, as he changed the needle and rewound the motor.

Markham had now left the window, and stood watching him with good-natured tolerance. The turn-table of the phonograph was spinning, and the needle was tracing its concentric revolutions; but still the instrument refused to play. Vance, with both hands on the cabinet, was leaning forward, his eyes fixed on the silently revolving record with an expression of amused bewilderment.

"The sound-box is probably broken," he said. "Silly machines, anyway."

"The difficulty, I imagine," Markham chided him, "lies in your patrician ignorance of so vulgar and democratic a mechanism.—Permit me to assist you."

He moved to Vance's side, and I stood looking curiously over his shoulder. Everything appeared to

be in order, and the needle had now almost reached the end of the record. But only a faint scratching was audible.

Markham stretched forth his hand to lift the sound-box. But his movement was never completed.

At that moment the little apartment was filled with several terrifying treble screams, followed by two shrill calls for help. A cold chill swept my body, and there was a tingling at the roots of my hair.

After a short silence, during which the three of us remained speechless, the same feminine voice said in a loud, distinct tone: "*No; nothing is the matter. I'm sorry. . . . Everything is all right. . . . Please go home, and don't worry.*"

The needle had come to the end of the record. There was a slight click, and the automatic device shut off the motor. The almost terrifying silence that followed was broken by a sardonic chuckle from Vance.

"Well, old dear," he remarked languidly, as he strolled back into the living-room, "so much for your irrefutable facts!"

There came a loud knocking on the door, and the officer on duty outside looked in with a startled face.

"It's all right," Markham informed him in a husky voice. "I'll call you when I want you."

Vance lay down on the davenport and took out another cigarette. Having lighted it, he stretched his arms far over his head and extended his legs, like a man in whom a powerful physical tension had suddenly relaxed.

"'Pon my soul, Markham, we've all been babes in the woods," he drawled. "An incontrovertible alibi—

my word! If the law supposes that, as Mr. Bumble said, the law is a ass, a idiot.—Oh, Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi! . . . Markham, I blush to admit it, but it's you and I who've been the unutterable asses."

Markham had been standing by the instrument like a man dazed, his eyes riveted hypnotically on the telltale record. Slowly he came into the room and threw himself wearily into a chair.

"Those precious facts of yours!" continued Vance. "Stripped of their carefully disguised appearance, what are they?—Spotswoode prepared a phonograph record—a simple enough task. Every one makes 'em nowadays——"

"Yes. He told me he had a workshop at his home on Long Island where he tinkered a bit."

"He really didn't need it, y' know. But it facilitated things, no doubt. The voice on the record is merely his own in falsetto—better for the purpose than a woman's, for it's stronger and more penetrating. As for the label, he simply soaked it off of an ordin'ry record, and pasted it on his own. He brought the lady several new records that night, and concealed this one among them. After the theatre he enacted his gruesome little drama and then carefully set the stage so that the police would think it was a typical burglar's performance. When this had been done, he placed the record on the machine, set it going, and calmly walked out. He had placed the prayer-rug and bronze bowl on the cabinet of the machine to give the impression that the phonograph was rarely used. And the precaution worked, for no one thought of looking into it. Why should they?

. . . Then he asked Jessup to call a taxicab—everything quite natural, y' see. While he was waiting for the car the needle reached the recorded screams. They were heard plainly: it was night, and the sounds carried distinctly. Moreover, being filtered through a wooden door, their phonographic *timbre* was well disguised. And, if you'll note, the enclosed horn is directed toward the door, not three feet away."

"But the synchronization of his questions and the answers on the record. . . ?"

"The simplest part of it. You remember Jessup told us that Spotswoode was standing with one arm on the switchboard when the screams were heard. He merely had his eye on his wrist-watch. The moment he heard the cry, he calculated the intermission on the record, and put his question to the imagin'ry lady at just the right moment to receive the record's response. It was all carefully figured out beforehand; he no doubt rehearsed it in his laborat'ry. It was deuced simple, and practically proof against failure. The record is a large one—twelve-inch diameter, I should say—and it requires about five minutes for the needle to traverse it. By putting the screams at the end, he allowed himself ample time to get out and order a taxicab. When the car at last came, he rode direct to the Stuyvesant Club, where he met Judge Redfern and played poker till three. If he hadn't met the Judge, rest assured he would have impressed his presence on some one else so as to have established an alibi."

Markham shook his head gravely.

"Good God! No wonder he importuned me on

every possible occasion to let him visit this apartment again. Such a damning piece of evidence as that record must have kept him awake at night."

"Still, I rather fancy that if I hadn't discovered it, he would have succeeded in getting possession of it as soon as your *sergent-de-ville* was removed. It was annoyin' to be unexpectedly barred from the apartment, but I doubt if it worried him much. He would have been on hand when the Canary's aunt took possession, and the retrieving of the record would have been comparatively easy. Of course the record constituted a hazard, but Spotswoode isn't the type who'd shy at a low bunker of that kind. No; the thing was planned scientifically enough. He was defeated by sheer accident."

"And Skeel?"

"He was another unfortunate circumstance. He was hiding in the closet there when Spotswoode and the lady came in at eleven. It was Spotswoode whom he saw strangle his erstwhile *amoureuse* and rifle the apartment. Then, when Spotswoode went out, he came forth from hiding. He was probably looking down at the girl when the phonograph emitted its blood-chilling wails. . . . My word! Fancy being in a cold funk, gazing at a murdered woman, and then hearing piercing screams behind you! It was a bit too much even for the hardened Tony. I don't wonder he forgot all caution and put his hand on the table to steady himself. . . . And then came Spotswoode's voice through the door, and the record's answer. This must have puzzled Skeel. I imagine he thought for a moment he'd lost his reason. But pretty soon the significance of it dawned on him;

and I can see him grinning to himself. Obviously he knew who the murderer was—it would not have been in keeping with his character had he failed to learn the identities of the Canary's admirers. And now there had fallen into his lap, like manna from heaven, the most perfect opportunity for blackmail that any such charmin' young gentleman could desire. He doubtless indulged himself with roseate visions of a life of opulence and ease at Spotswoode's expense. When Cleaver phoned a few minutes later, he merely said the lady was out, and then set to work planning his own departure."

"But I don't see why he didn't take the record with him."

"And remove from the scene of the crime the one piece of unanswerable evidence? . . . Bad strategy, Markham. If he himself had produced the record later, Spotswoode would simply have denied all knowledge of it, and accused the blackmailer of a plot. Oh, no; Skeel's only course was to leave it, and apply for an enormous settlement from Spotswoode at once. And I imagine that's what he did. Spotswoode no doubt gave him something on account and promised him the rest anon, hoping in the meantime to retrieve the record. When he failed to pay, Skeel phoned you and threatened to tell everything, thinking to spur Spotswoode to action. . . . Well, he spurred him—but not to the action desired. Spotswoode probably met him by appointment last Saturday night, ostensibly to hand over the money, but, instead, throttled the chap. Quite in keeping with his nature, don't y' know. . . . Stout fella, Spotswoode."

"The whole thing . . . it's amazing."

"I shouldn't say that, now. Spotswoode had an unpleasant task to perform, and he set about it in a cool, logical, forthright, businesslike manner. He had decided that his little Canary must die for his peace of mind: she'd probably made herself most annoyin'. So he arranged the date—like any judge passing sentence on a prisoner at the bar—and then proceeded to fabricate an alibi. Being something of a mechanic, he arranged a mechanical alibi. The device he chose was simple and obvious enough—no tortuosities or complications. And it would have succeeded but for what the insurance companies piously call an act of God. No one can foresee accidents, Markham: they wouldn't be accidental if one could. But Spotswoode certainly took every precaution that was humanly possible. It never occurred to him that you would thwart his every effort to return here and confiscate the record; and he couldn't anticipate my taste in music, nor know that I would seek solace in the tonal art. Furthermore, when one calls on a lady, one doesn't expect that another suitor is going to hide himself in the clothes-press. It isn't done, don't y' know. . . . All in all, the poor johnny was beaten by a run of abominable luck."

"You overlook the fiendishness of the crime," Markham reproached him tartly.

"Don't be so confoundedly moral, old thing. Every one's a murderer at heart. The person who has never felt a passionate hankering to kill some one is without emotions. And do you think it's ethics or theology that stays the average person from homicide? Dear no! It's lack of courage—the fear of

being found out, or haunted, or cursed with remorse. Observe with what delight the people *en masse*—to wit, the state—put men to death, and then gloat over it in the newspapers. Nations declare war against one another on the slightest provocation, so they can, with immunity, vent their lust for slaughter. Spotswoode, I'd say, is merely a rational animal with the courage of his convictions."

"Society unfortunately isn't ready for your nihilistic philosophy just yet," said Markham. "And during the intervening transition human life must be protected."

He rose resolutely, and going to the telephone, called up Heath.

"Sergeant," he ordered, "get a John-Doe warrant and meet me immediately at the Stuyvesant Club. Bring a man with you—there's an arrest to be made."

"At last the law has evidence after its own heart," chirped Vance, as he lazily donned his top-coat and picked up his hat and stick. "What a grotesque affair your legal procedure is, Markham! Scientific knowledge—the facts of psychology—mean nothing to you learned Solons. But a phonograph record—ah! There, now, is something convincing, irrefragable, final, what?"

On our way out Markham beckoned to the officer on guard.

"Under no conditions," he said, "is any one to enter this apartment until I return—not even with a signed permit."

When we had entered the taxicab, he directed the chauffeur to the club.

"So the newspapers want action, do they? Well,

they're going to get it. . . . You've helped me out of a nasty hole, old man."

As he spoke, his eyes turned to Vance. And that look conveyed a profounder gratitude than any words could have expressed.

CHAPTER XXX

THE END

(Tuesday, September 18; 3.30 p. m.)

It was exactly half past three when we entered the rotunda of the Stuyvesant Club. Markham at once sent for the manager, and held a few words of private conversation with him. The manager then hastened away, and was gone about five minutes.

"Mr. Spotswoode is in his rooms," he informed Markham, on returning. "I sent the electrician up to test the light bulbs. He reports that the gentleman is alone, writing at his desk."

"And the room number?"

"Three forty-one." The manager appeared perturbed. "There won't be any fuss, will there, Mr. Markham?"

"I don't look for any." Markham's tone was chilly. "However, the present matter is considerably more important than your club."

"What an exaggerated point of view!" sighed Vance when the manager had left us. "The arrest of Spotswoode, I'd say, was the acme of futility. The man isn't a criminal, don't y' know; he has nothing in common with Lombroso's *Uomo Delinquente*. He's what one might term a philosophic behaviorist."

Markham grunted but did not answer. He began pacing up and down agitatedly, keeping his eyes ex-

pectantly on the main entrance. Vance sought a comfortable chair, and settled himself in it with placid unconcern.

Ten minutes later Heath and Snitkin arrived. Markham at once led them into an alcove and briefly explained his reason for summoning them.

"Spotswoode's up-stairs now," he said. "I want the arrest made as quietly as possible."

"Spotswoode!" Heath repeated the name in astonishment. "I don't see——"

"You don't have to see—yet," Markham cut in sharply. "I'm taking all responsibility for the arrest. And you're getting the credit—if you want it. That suit you?"

Heath shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all right with me . . . anything you say, sir." He shook his head uncomprehendingly. "But what about Jessup?"

"We'll keep him locked up. Material witness."

We ascended in the elevator and emerged at the third floor. Spotswoode's rooms were at the end of the hall, facing the Square. Markham, his face set grimly, led the way.

In answer to his knock Spotswoode opened the door and, greeting us pleasantly, stepped aside for us to enter.

"Any news yet?" he asked, moving a chair forward.

At this moment he got a clear view of Markham's face in the light, and at once he sensed the minatory nature of our visit. Though his expression did not alter, I saw his body suddenly go taut. His cold, indecipherable eyes moved slowly from Markham's face

to Heath and Snitkin. Then his gaze fell on Vance and me, who were standing a little behind the others, and he nodded stiffly.

No one spoke; yet I felt that an entire tragedy was somehow being enacted, and that each actor heard and understood every word.

Markham remained standing, as if reluctant to proceed. Of all the duties of his office, I knew that the arrest of malefactors was the most distasteful to him. He was a worldly man, with the worldly man's tolerance for the misfortunes of evil. Heath and Snitkin had stepped forward and now waited with passive alertness for the District Attorney's order to serve the warrant.

Spotswoode's eyes were again on Markham.

"What can I do for you, sir?" His voice was calm and without the faintest quaver.

"You can accompany these officers, Mr. Spotswoode," Markham told him quietly, with a slight inclination of his head toward the two imperturbable figures at his side. "I arrest you for the murder of Margaret Odell."

"Ah!" Spotswoode's eyebrows lifted mildly. "Then you have—discovered something?"

"The Beethoven *Andante*."

Not a muscle of Spotswoode's face moved; but after a short pause he made a barely perceptible gesture of resignation.

"I can't say that it was wholly unexpected," he said evenly, with the tragic suggestion of a smile; "especially as you thwarted every effort of mine to secure the record. But then . . . the fortunes of the game are always uncertain." His smile faded,

and his manner became grave. "You have acted generously toward me, Mr. Markham, in shielding me from the *canaille;* and because I appreciate that courtesy I should like you to know that the game I played was one in which I had no alternative."

"Your motive, however powerful," said Markham, "cannot extenuate your crime."

"Do you think I seek extenuation?" Spotswoode dismissed the imputation with a contemptuous gesture. "I'm not a schoolboy. I calculated the consequences of my course of action, and after weighing the various factors involved, decided to risk it. It was a gamble, to be sure; but it's not my habit to complain about the misfortunes of a deliberately planned risk. Furthermore, the choice was practically forced upon me. Had I not gambled in this instance, I stood to lose heavily nevertheless."

His face grew bitter.

"This woman, Mr. Markham, had demanded the impossible of me. Not content with bleeding me financially, she demanded legal protection, position, social prestige—such things as only my name could give her. She informed me I must divorce my wife and marry her. I wonder if you apprehend the enormity of that demand? . . . You see, Mr. Markham, I love my wife, and I have children whom I love. I will not insult your intelligence by explaining how, despite my conduct, such a thing is entirely possible. . . . And yet, this woman commanded me to wreck my life and crush utterly those I held dear, solely to gratify her petty, ridiculous ambition! When I refused, she threatened to expose our relations to my wife, to send her copies of the letters I

had written, to sue me publicly—in fine, to create such a scandal that, in any event, my life would be ruined, my family disgraced, my home destroyed."

He paused and drew a deep inspiration.

"I have never been partial to half-way measures," he continued impassively. "I have no talent for compromise. Perhaps I am a victim of my heritage. But my instinct is to play out a hand to the last chip—to force whatever danger threatens. And for just five minutes, a week ago, I understood how the fanatics of old could, with a calm mind and a sense of righteousness, torture their enemies who threatened them with spiritual destruction. . . . I chose the only course which might save those I love from disgrace and suffering. It meant taking a desperate risk. But the blood within me was such that I did not hesitate, and I was fired by the agony of a tremendous hate. I staked my life against a living death, on the remote chance of attaining peace. And I lost."

Again he smiled faintly.

"Yes—the fortunes of the game. . . . But don't think for a minute that I am complaining or seeking sympathy. I have lied to others perhaps, but not to myself. I detest a whiner—a self-excuser. I want you to understand that."

He reached to the table at his side and took up a small limp-leather volume.

"Only last night I was reading Wilde's 'De Profundis.' Had I been gifted with words, I might have made a similar confession. Let me show you what I mean so that, at least, you won't attribute to me the final infamy of cravenness."

He opened the book, and began reading in a voice whose very fervor held us all silent:

"'I brought about my own downfall. No one, be he high or low, need be ruined by any other hand than his own. Readily as I confess this, there are many who will, at this time at least, receive the confession sceptically. And although I thus mercilessly accuse myself, bear in mind that I do so without offering any excuse. Terrible as is the punishment inflicted upon me by the world, more terrible is the ruin I have brought upon myself. . . . In the dawn of manhood I recognized my position. . . . I enjoyed an honored name, an eminent social position. . . . Then came the turning-point. I had become tired of dwelling on the heights—and descended by my own will into the depths. . . . I satisfied my desires wherever it suited me, and passed on. I forgot that every act, even the most insignificant act, of daily life, in some degree, makes or unmakes the character; and every occurrence which transpires in the seclusion of the chamber will some day be proclaimed from the housetops. I lost control of myself. I was no longer at the helm, and knew it not. I had become a slave to pleasure. . . . One thing only is left to me—complete humility.'"

He tossed the book aside.

"You understand now, Mr. Markham?"

Markham did not speak for several moments.

"Do you care to tell me about Skeel?" he at length asked.

"That swine!" Spotswoode sneered his disgust. "I could murder such creatures every day and regard myself as a benefactor of society. . . . Yes, I

strangled him, and I would have done it before, only the opportunity did not offer. . . . It was Skeel who was hiding in the closet when I returned to the apartment after the theatre, and he must have seen me kill the woman. Had I known he was behind that locked closet door, I would have broken it down and wiped him out then. But how was I to know? It seemed natural that the closet might have been kept locked—I didn't give it a second thought. . . . And the next night he telephoned me to the club here. He had first called my home on Long Island, and learned that I was staying here. I had never seen him before—didn't know of his existence. But, it seems, he had equipped himself with a knowledge of my identity—probably some of the money I gave to the woman went to him. What a muck-heap I had fallen into! . . . When he phoned, he mentioned the phonograph, and I knew he had found out something. I met him in the Waldorf lobby, and he told me the truth: there was no doubting his word. When he saw I was convinced, he demanded so enormous a sum that I was staggered."

Spotswoode lit a cigarette with steady fingers.

"Mr. Markham, I am no longer a rich man. The truth is, I am on the verge of bankruptcy. The business my father left me has been in a receiver's hands for nearly a year. The Long Island estate on which I live belongs to my wife. Few people know these things, but unfortunately they are true. It would have been utterly impossible for me to raise the amount Skeel demanded, even had I been inclined to play the coward. I did, however, give him a small sum to keep him quiet for a few days, promising him

all he asked as soon as I could convert some of my holdings. I hoped in the interim to get possession of the record and thus spike his guns. But in that I failed; and so, when he threatened to tell you everything, I agreed to bring the money to his home late last Saturday night. I kept the appointment, with the full intention of killing him. I was careful about entering, but he had helped me by explaining when and how I could get in without being seen. Once there, I wasted no time. The first moment he was off his guard I seized him—and gloried in the act. Then, locking the door and taking the key, I walked out of the house quite openly, and returned here to the club.—That's all, I think."

Vance was watching him musingly.

"So when you raised my bet last night," he said, "the amount represented a highly important item in your exchequer."

Spotswoode smiled faintly.

"It represented practically every cent I had in the world."

"Astonishin'! . . . And would you mind if I asked you why you selected the label of Beethoven's *Andante* for your record?"

"Another miscalculation," the man said wearily. "It occurred to me that if any one should, by any chance, open the phonograph before I could return and destroy the record, he wouldn't be as likely to want to hear the classics as he would a more popular selection."

"And one who detests popular music had to find it! I fear, Mr. Spotswoode, that an unkind fate sat in at your game."

"Yes. . . . If I were religiously inclined, I might talk poppycock about retribution and divine punishment."

"I'd like to ask you about the jewellery," said Markham. "It's not sportsmanlike to do it, and I wouldn't suggest it, except that you've already confessed voluntarily to the main points at issue."

"I shall take no offense at any question you desire to ask, sir," Spotswoode answered. "After I had recovered my letters from the document-box, I turned the rooms upside down to give the impression of a burglary—being careful to use gloves, of course. And I took the woman's jewellery for the same reason. Parenthetically, I had paid for most of it. I offered it as a sop to Skeel, but he was afraid to accept it; and finally I decided to rid myself of it. I wrapped it in one of the club newspapers and threw it in a waste-bin near the Flatiron Building."

"You wrapped it in the morning *Herald*," put in Heath. "Did you know that Pop Cleaver reads nothing but the *Herald?*"

"Sergeant!" Vance's voice was a cutting reprimand. "Certainly Mr. Spotswoode was not aware of that fact—else he would not have selected the *Herald.*"

Spotswoode smiled at Heath with pitying contempt. Then, with an appreciative glance at Vance, he turned back to Markham.

"An hour or so after I had disposed of the jewels I was assailed by the fear that the package might be found and the paper traced. So I bought another *Herald* and put it on the rack." He paused. "Is that all?"

Markham nodded.

"Thank you—that's all; except that I must now ask you to go with these officers."

"In that case," said Spotswoode quietly, "there's a small favor I have to ask of you, Mr. Markham. Now that the blow has fallen, I wish to write a certain note—to my wife. But I want to be alone when I write it. Surely you understand that desire. It will take but a few moments. Your men may stand at the door—I can't very well escape. . . . The victor can afford to be generous to that extent."

Before Markham had time to reply, Vance stepped forward and touched his arm.

"I trust," he interposed, "that you won't deem it necess'ry to refuse Mr. Spotswoode's request."

Markham looked at him hesitantly.

"I guess you've pretty well earned the right to dictate, Vance," he acquiesced.

Then he ordered Heath and Snitkin to wait outside in the hall, and he and Vance and I went into the adjoining room. Markham stood, as if on guard, near the door; but Vance, with an ironical smile, sauntered to the window and gazed out into Madison Square.

"My word, Markham!" he declared. "There's something rather colossal about that chap. Y' know, one can't help admiring him. He's so eminently sane and logical."

Markham made no response. The drone of the city's mid-afternoon noises, muffled by the closed windows, seemed to intensify the ominous silence of the little bedchamber where we waited.

Then came a sharp report from the other room.

Markham flung open the door. Heath and Snitkin

were already rushing toward Spotswoode's prostrate body, and were bending over it when Markham entered. Immediately he wheeled about and glared at Vance, who now appeared in the doorway.

"He's shot himself!"

"Fancy that," said Vance.

"You—you knew he was going to do that?" Markham spluttered.

"It was rather obvious, don't y' know."

Markham's eyes flashed angrily.

"And you deliberately interceded for him—to give him the opportunity?"

"Tut, tut, my dear fellow!" Vance reproached him. "Pray don't give way to conventional moral indignation. However unethical—theoretically—it may be to take another's life, a man's own life is certainly his to do with as he chooses. Suicide is his inalienable right. And under the paternal tyranny of our modern democracy, I'm rather inclined to think it's about the only right he has left, what?"

He glanced at his watch and frowned.

"D' ye know, I've missed my concert, bothering with your beastly affairs," he complained amiably, giving Markham an engaging smile; "and now you're actually scolding me. 'Pon my word, old fellow, you're deuced ungrateful!"

THE GREENE MURDER CASE

TO

NORBERT L. LEDERER

Ἀγαθὴ δὲ παράφασίς ἐστιν ἑταίρου

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CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

PHILO VANCE

JOHN F.-X. MARKHAM
District Attorney of New York County.

MRS. TOBIAS GREENE
The mistress of the Greene mansion.

JULIA GREENE
The eldest daughter.

SIBELLA GREENE
Another daughter.

ADA GREENE
The youngest daughter.

CHESTER GREENE
The elder son.

REX GREENE
The younger son.

DR. ARTHUR VON BLON
The Greene family physician.

SPROOT
The Greene butler.

GERTRUDE MANNHEIM
The cook.

HEMMING
The senior maid.

BARTON
The junior maid.

MISS CRAVEN
Mrs. Greene's nurse.

CHIEF INSPECTOR O'BRIEN
Of the Police Department of New York City.

WILLIAM M. MORAN
Commanding officer of the Detective Bureau.

ERNEST HEATH
Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau.

SNITKIN
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

BURKE
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

CAPTAIN ANTHONY P. JERYM
Bertillon expert.

CAPTAIN DUBOIS
Finger-print expert.

DR. EMANUEL DOREMUS
Medical Examiner.

DR. DRUMM
An official police surgeon.

MARIE O'BRIEN
A Police nurse.

SWACKER
Secretary to the District Attorney.

CURRIE
Vance's valet.

CHAPTER I

A DOUBLE TRAGEDY

(Tuesday, November 9; 10 a. m.)

It has long been a source of wonder to me why the leading criminological writers—men like Edmund Lester Pearson, H. B. Irving, Filson Young, Canon Brookes, William Bolitho, and Harold Eaton—have not devoted more space to the Greene tragedy; for here, surely, is one of the outstanding murder mysteries of modern times—a case practically unique in the annals of latter-day crime. And yet I realize, as I read over my own voluminous notes on the case, and inspect the various documents relating to it, how little of its inner history ever came to light, and how impossible it would be for even the most imaginative chronicler to fill in the hiatuses.

The world, of course, knows the external facts. For over a month the press of two continents was filled with accounts of this appalling tragedy; and even the bare outline was sufficient to gratify the public's craving for the abnormal and the spectacular. But the inside story of the catastrophe surpassed even the wildest flights of public fancy; and, as I now sit down to divulge those facts for the first time, I am oppressed with a feeling akin to unreality, although I was a witness to most of them and hold in my possession the incontestable records of their actuality.

Of the fiendish ingenuity which lay behind this

terrible crime, of the warped psychological motives that inspired it, and of the strange hidden sources of its technic, the world is completely ignorant. Moreover, no explanation has ever been given of the analytic steps that led to its solution. Nor have the events attending the mechanism of that solution—events in themselves highly dramatic and unusual—ever been recounted. The public believes that the termination of the case was a result of the usual police methods of investigation; but this is because the public is unaware of many of the vital factors of the crime itself, and because both the Police Department and the District Attorney's office have, as if by tacit agreement, refused to make known the entire truth —whether for fear of being disbelieved or merely because there are certain things so terrible that no man wishes to talk of them, I do not know.

The record, therefore, which I am about to set down is the first complete and unedited history of the Greene holocaust.* I feel that now the truth should be known, for it is history, and one should not shrink from historical facts. Also, I believe that the credit for the solution of this case should go where it belongs.

The man who elucidated the mystery and brought to a close that palimpsest of horror was, curiously enough, in no way officially connected with the police; and in all the published accounts of the murder his name was not once mentioned. And yet, had it not been for him and his novel methods of criminal deduction, the heinous plot against the Greene fam-

* It is, I hope, unnecessary for me to state that I have received official permission for my task.

ily would have been conclusively successful. The police in their researches were dealing dogmatically with the evidential appearances of the crime, whereas the operations of the criminal were being conducted on a plane quite beyond the comprehension of the ordinary investigator.

This man who, after weeks of sedulous and disheartening analysis, eventually ferreted out the source of the horror, was a young social aristocrat, an intimate friend of John F.-X. Markham, the District Attorney. His name I am not at liberty to divulge, but for the purposes of these chronicles I have chosen to call him Philo Vance. He is no longer in this country, having transferred his residence several years ago to a villa outside of Florence; and, since he has no intention of returning to America, he has acceded to my request to publish the history of the criminal cases in which he participated as a sort of *amicus curiæ*. Markham also has retired to private life; and Sergeant Ernest Heath, that doughty and honest officer of the Homicide Bureau who officially handled the Greene case for the Police Department, has, through an unexpected legacy, been able to gratify his life's ambition to breed fancy wyandottes on a model farm in the Mohawk Valley. Thus circumstances have made it possible for me to publish my intimate records of the Greene tragedy.

A few words are necessary to explain my own participation in the case. (I say "participation," though, in reality, my rôle was that of passive spectator.) For several years I had been Vance's personal attorney. I had resigned from my father's law firm—Van Dine, Davis & Van Dine—in order

to devote myself exclusively to Vance's legal and financial needs, which, by the way, were not many. Vance and I had been friends from our undergraduate days at Harvard, and I found in my new duties as his legal agent and monetary steward a sinecure combined with many social and cultural compensations.

Vance at that time was thirty-four years old. He was just under six feet, slender, sinewy, and graceful. His chiselled regular features gave his face the attraction of strength and uniform modelling, but a sardonic coldness of expression precluded the designation of handsome. He had aloof gray eyes, a straight, slender nose, and a mouth suggesting both cruelty and asceticism. But, despite the severity of his lineaments—which acted like an impenetrable glass wall between him and his fellows—, he was highly sensitive and mobile; and, though his manner was somewhat detached and supercilious, he exerted an undeniable fascination over those who knew him at all well.

Much of his education had been acquired in Europe, and he still retained a slight Oxonian accent and intonation, though I happen to be aware that this was no affectation: he cared too little for the opinions of others to trouble about maintaining any pose. He was an indefatigable student. His mind was ever eager for knowledge, and he devoted much of his time to the study of ethnology and psychology. His greatest intellectual enthusiasm was art, and he fortunately had an income sufficient to indulge his passion for collecting. It was, however, his interest in psychology and his application of it to individual

behaviorism that first turned his attention to the criminal problems which came under Markham's jurisdiction.

The first case in which he participated was, as I have recorded elsewhere, the murder of Alvin Benson.* The second was the seemingly insoluble strangling of the famous Broadway beauty, Margaret Odell.† And in the late fall of the same year came the Greene tragedy. As in the two former cases, I kept a complete record of this new investigation. I possessed myself of every available document, making verbatim copies of those claimed for the police archives, and even jotted down the numerous conversations that took place in and out of conference between Vance and the official investigators. And, in addition, I kept a diary which, for elaborateness and completeness, would have been the despair of Samuel Pepys.

The Greene murder case occurred toward the end of Markham's first year in office. As you may remember, the winter came very early that season. There were two severe blizzards in November, and the amount of snowfall for that month broke all local records for eighteen years. I mention this fact of the early snows because it played a sinister part in the Greene affair: it was, indeed, one of the vital factors of the murderer's scheme. No one has yet understood, or even sensed, the connection between the unseasonable weather of that late fall and the fatal tragedy that fell upon the Greene household; but that is because all of the dark secrets of the case were not made known.

* "The Benson Murder Case" (Scribners, 1926).
† "The 'Canary' Murder Case" (Scribners, 1927).

Vance was projected into the Benson murder as the result of a direct challenge from Markham; and his activities in the Canary case were due to his own expressed desire to lend a hand. But pure coincidence was responsible for his participation in the Greene investigation. During the two months that had elapsed since his solution of the Canary's death Markham had called upon him several times regarding moot points of criminal detection in connection with the routine work of the District Attorney's office; and it was during an informal discussion of one of these problems that the Greene case was first mentioned.

Markham and Vance had long been friends. Though dissimilar in tastes and even in ethical outlook, they nevertheless respected each other profoundly. I have often marvelled at the friendship of these two antipodal men; but as the years went by I came more and more to understand it. It was as if they were drawn together by those very qualities which each realized—perhaps with a certain repressed regret—were lacking in his own nature. Markham was forthright, brusque, and, on occasion, domineering, taking life with grim and serious concern, and following the dictates of his legal conscience in the face of every obstacle: honest, incorruptible, and untiring. Vance, on the other hand, was volatile, debonair, and possessed of a perpetual Juvenalian cynicism, smiling ironically at the bitterest realities, and consistently fulfilling the rôle of a whimsically disinterested spectator of life. But, withal, he understood people as profoundly as he understood art, and his dissection of motives and his

shrewd readings of character were—as I had many occasions to witness—uncannily accurate. Markham apprehended these qualities in Vance, and sensed their true value.

It was not yet ten o'clock of the morning of November the 9th when Vance and I, after motoring to the old Criminal Courts Building on the corner of Franklin and Centre Streets, went directly to the District Attorney's office on the fourth floor. On that momentous forenoon two gangsters, each accusing the other of firing the fatal shot in a recent pay-roll hold-up, were to be cross-examined by Markham; and this interview was to decide the question as to which of the men would be charged with murder and which held as a State's witness. Markham and Vance had discussed the situation the night before in the lounge-room of the Stuyvesant Club, and Vance had expressed a desire to be present at the examination. Markham had readily assented, and so we had risen early and driven down-town.

The interview with the two men lasted for an hour, and Vance's disconcerting opinion was that neither was guilty of the actual shooting.

"Y' know, Markham," he drawled, when the sheriff had returned the prisoners to the Tombs, "those two Jack Sheppards are quite sincere: each one thinks he's telling the truth. *Ergo*, neither of 'em fired the shot. A distressin' predicament. They're obvious gallows-birds—born for the gibbet; and it's a beastly shame not to be able to round out their destinies in proper fashion. . . . I say, wasn't there another participant in the hold-up?"

Markham nodded. "A third got away. Accord-

ing to these two, it was a well-known gangster named Eddie Maleppo."

"Then Eduardo is your man."*

Markham did not reply, and Vance rose lazily and reached for his ulster.

"By the by," he said, slipping into his coat, "I note that our upliftin' press bedecked its front pages this morning with head-lines about a pogrom at the old Greene mansion last night. Wherefore?"

Markham glanced quickly at the clock on the wall, and frowned.

"That reminds me. Chester Greene called up the first thing this morning and insisted on seeing me. I told him eleven o'clock."

"Where do *you* fit in?" Vance had taken his hand from the door-knob, and drew out his cigarette-case.

"I don't!" snapped Markham. "But people think the District Attorney's office is a kind of clearing-house for all their troubles. It happens, however, that I've known Chester Greene a long time—we're both members of the Marylebone Golf Club—and so I must listen to his plaint about what was obviously an attempt to annex the famous Greene plate."

"Burglary—eh, what?" Vance took a few puffs on his cigarette. "With two women shot?"

"Oh, it was a miserable business! An amateur, no doubt. Got in a panic, shot up the place, and bolted."

"Seems a dashed curious proceeding." Vance ab-

* This was subsequently proved correct. Nearly a year later Maleppo was arrested in Detroit, extradited to New York, and convicted of the murder. His two companions had already been successfully prosecuted for robbery. They are now serving long terms in Sing Sing.

stractedly reseated himself in a large armchair near the door. "Did the antique cutlery actually disappear?"

"Nothing was taken. The thief was evidently frightened off before he made his haul."

"Sounds a bit thick, don't y' know.—An amateur thief breaks into a prominent home, casts a predat'ry eye on the dining-room silver, takes alarm, goes up-stairs and shoots two women in their respective boudoirs, and then flees. . . . Very touchin' and all that, but unconvincin'. Whence came this caressin' theory?"

Markham was glowering, but when he spoke it was with an effort at restraint.

"Feathergill was on duty last night when the call was relayed from Headquarters, and accompanied the police to the house. He agrees with their conclusions."*

"Nevertheless, I could bear to know why Chester Greene is desirous of having polite converse with you."

Markham compressed his lips. He was not in cordial mood that morning, and Vance's flippant curiosity irked him. After a moment, however, he said grudgingly:

"Since the attempted robbery interests you so keenly, you may, if you insist, wait and hear what Greene has to say."

"I'll stay," smiled Vance, removing his coat. "I'm weak; just can't resist a passionate entreaty. . . .

* Amos Feathergill was then an Assistant District Attorney. He later ran on the Tammany ticket for assemblyman, and was elected.

Which one of the Greenes is Chester? And how is he related to the two deceased?"

"There was only one murder," Markham corrected him in a tone of forbearance. "The oldest daughter—an unmarried woman in her early forties—was killed instantly. A younger daughter, who was also shot, has, I believe, a chance of recovery."

"And Chester?"

"Chester is the elder son, a man of forty or thereabouts. He was the first person on the scene after the shots had been fired."

"What other members of the family are there? I know old Tobias Greene has gone to his Maker."

"Yes, old Tobias died about twelve years ago. But his wife is still living, though she's a helpless paralytic. Then there are—or rather were—five children: the oldest, Julia; next, Chester; then another daughter, Sibella, a few years under thirty, I should say; then Rex, a sickly, bookish boy a year or so younger than Sibella; and Ada, the youngest—an adopted daughter twenty-two or three, perhaps."

"And it was Julia who was killed, eh? Which of the other two girls was shot?"

"The younger—Ada. Her room, it seems, is across the hall from Julia's, and the thief apparently got in it by mistake while making his escape. As I understand it, he entered Ada's room immediately after firing on Julia, saw his error, fired again, and then fled, eventually going down the stairs and out the main entrance."

Vance smoked a while in silence.

"Your hypothetical intruder must have been deuced confused to have mistaken Ada's bedroom

door for the staircase, what? And then there's the query: what was this anonymous gentleman, who had called to collect the plate, doing above-stairs?"

"Probably looking for jewellery." Markham was rapidly losing patience. "*I* am not omniscient." There was irony in his inflection.

"Now, now, Markham!" pleaded Vance cajolingly. "Don't be vindictive. Your Greene burglary promises several nice points in academic speculation. Permit me to indulge my idle whims."

At that moment Swacker, Markham's youthful and alert secretary, appeared at the swinging door which communicated with a narrow chamber between the main waiting-room and the District Attorney's private office.

"Mr. Chester Greene is here," he announced.

CHAPTER II

THE INVESTIGATION OPENS

(Tuesday, November 9; 11 a. m.)

When Chester Greene entered it was obvious he was under a nervous strain; but his nervousness evoked no sympathy in me. From the very first I disliked the man. He was of medium height and was bordering on corpulence. There was something soft and flabby in his contours; and, though he was dressed with studied care, there were certain signs of overemphasis about his clothes. His cuffs were too tight; his collar was too snug; and the colored silk handkerchief hung too far out of his breast pocket. He was slightly bald, and the lids of his close-set eyes projected like those of a man with Bright's disease. His mouth, surmounted by a close-cropped blond moustache, was loose; and his chin receded slightly and was deeply creased below the under lip. He typified the pampered idler.

When he had shaken hands with Markham, and Vance and I had been introduced, he seated himself and meticulously inserted a brown Russian cigarette in a long amber-and-gold holder.

"I'd be tremendously obliged, Markham," he said, lighting his cigarette from an ivory pocket-lighter, "if you'd make a personal investigation of the row that occurred at our diggin's last night. The police will never get anywhere the way they're going about

it. Good fellows, you understand—the police. But . . . well, there's something about this affair—don't know just how to put it. Anyway, I don't like it."

Markham studied him closely for several moments.

"Just what's on your mind, Greene?"

The other crushed out his cigarette, though he had taken no more than half a dozen puffs, and drummed indecisively on the arm of his chair.

"Wish I knew. It's a rum affair—damned rum. There's something back of it, too—something that's going to raise the very devil if we don't stop it. Can't explain it. It's a feeling I've got."

"Perhaps Mr. Greene is psychic," commented Vance, with a look of bland innocence.

The man swung about and scrutinized Vance with aggressive condescension. "Tosh!" He brought out another Russian cigarette, and turned again to Markham: "I do wish you'd take a peep at the situation."

Markham hesitated. "Surely you've some reason for disagreeing with the police and appealing to me."

"Funny thing, but I haven't." (It seemed to me Greene's hand shook slightly as he lit his second cigarette.) "I simply know that my mind rejects the burglar story automatically."

It was difficult to tell if he were being frank or deliberately hiding something. I did feel, however, that some sort of fear lurked beneath his uneasiness; and I also got the impression that he was far from being heart-broken over the tragedy.

"It seems to me," declared Markham, "that the theory of the burglar is entirely consistent with the facts. There have been many other cases of a house-

breaker suddenly taking alarm, losing his head, and needlessly shooting people."

Greene rose abruptly and began pacing up and down.

"I can't argue the case," he muttered. "It's beyond all that, if you understand me." He looked quickly at the District Attorney with staring eyes. "Gad! It's got me in a cold sweat."

"It's all too vague and intangible," Markham observed kindly. "I'm inclined to think the tragedy has upset you. Perhaps after a day or two——"

Greene lifted a protesting hand.

"It's no go. I'm telling you, Markham, the police will never find their burglar. I feel it—here." He mincingly laid a manicured hand on his breast.

Vance had been watching him with a faint suggestion of amusement. Now he stretched his legs before him and gazed up at the ceiling.

"I say, Mr. Greene—pardon the intrusion on your esoteric gropings—but do you know of any one with a reason for wanting your two sisters out of the way?"

The man looked blank for a moment.

"No," he answered finally; "can't say that I do. Who, in Heaven's name, would want to kill two harmless women?"

"I haven't the groggiest notion. But, since you repudiate the burglar theory, and since the two ladies were undoubtedly shot, it's inferable that some one sought their demise; and it occurred to me that you, being their brother and domiciled *en famille*, might know of some one who harbored homicidal sentiments toward them."

Greene bristled, and thrust his head forward. "I know of no one," he blurted. Then, turning to Markham, he continued wheedlingly: "If I had the slightest suspicion, don't you think I'd come out with it? This thing has got on my nerves. I've been mulling over it all night, and it's—it's bothersome, frightfully bothersome."

Markham nodded non-committally, and rising, walked to the window, where he stood, his hands behind him, gazing down on the gray stone masonry of the Tombs.

Vance, despite his apparent apathy, had been studying Greene closely; and, as Markham turned to the window, he straightened up slightly in his chair.

"Tell me," he began, an ingratiating note in his voice; "just what happened last night? I understand you were the first to reach the prostrate women."

"I was the first to reach my sister Julia," retorted Greene, with a hint of resentment. "It was Sproot, the butler, who found Ada unconscious, bleeding from a nasty wound in her back."

"Her back, eh?" Vance leaned forward, and lifted his eyebrows. "She was shot from behind, then?"

"Yes." Greene frowned and inspected his fingernails, as if he too sensed something disturbing in the fact.

"And Miss Julia Greene: was she too shot from behind?"

"No—from the front."

"Extr'ordin'ry!" Vance blew a ring of smoke toward the dusty chandelier. "And had both women retired for the night?"

"An hour before. . . . But what has all that got to do with it?"

"One never knows, does one? However, it's always well to be in possession of these little details when trying to run down the elusive source of a psychic seizure."

"Psychic seizure be damned!" growled Greene truculently. "Can't a man have a feeling about something without——?"

"Quite—quite. But you've asked for the District Attorney's assistance, and I'm sure he would like a few data before making a decision."

Markham came forward and sat down on the edge of the table. His curiosity had been aroused, and he indicated to Greene his sympathy with Vance's interrogation.

Greene pursed his lips, and returned his cigarette-holder to his pocket.

"Oh, very well. What else do you want to know?"

"You might relate for us," dulcetly resumed Vance, "the exact order of events after you heard the first shot. I presume you did hear the shot."

"Certainly I heard it—couldn't have helped hearing it. Julia's room is next to mine, and I was still awake. I jumped into my slippers and pulled on my dressing-gown; then I went out into the hall. It was dark, and I felt my way along the wall until I reached Julia's door. I opened it and looked in—didn't know who might be there waiting to pop me—and I saw her lying in bed, the front of her night-gown covered with blood. There was no one else in the room, and I went to her immediately. Just then I heard another shot which sounded as if it came

from Ada's room. I was a bit muzzy by this time —didn't know what I'd better do; and as I stood by Julia's bed in something of a funk—oh, I was in a funk all right . . ."

"Can't say that I blame you," Vance encouraged him.

Greene nodded. "A damned ticklish position to be in. Well, anyway, as I stood there, I heard some one coming down the stairs from the servants' quarters on the third floor, and recognized old Sproot's tread. He fumbled along in the dark, and I heard him enter Ada's door. Then he called to me, and I hurried over. Ada was lying in front of the dressing-table; and Sproot and I lifted her on the bed. I'd gone a bit weak in the knees; was expecting any minute to hear another shot—don't know why. Anyway, it didn't come; and then I heard Sproot's voice at the hall telephone calling up Doctor Von Blon."

"I see nothing in your account, Greene, inconsistent with the theory of a burglar," observed Markham. "And furthermore, Feathergill, my assistant, says there were two sets of confused footprints in the snow outside the front door."

Greene shrugged his shoulders, but did not answer.

"By the by, Mr. Greene,"—Vance had slipped down in his chair and was staring into space—"you said that when you looked into Miss Julia's room you saw her in bed. How was that? Did you turn on the light?"

"Why, no!" The man appeared puzzled by the question. "The light was on."

There was a flutter of interest in Vance's eyes.

"And how about Miss Ada's room? Was the light on there also?"

"Yes."

Vance reached into his pocket, and, drawing out his cigarette-case, carefully and deliberately selected a cigarette. I recognized in the action an evidence of repressed inner excitement.

"So the lights were on in both rooms. Most interestin'."

Markham, too, recognized the eagerness beneath his apparent indifference, and regarded him expectantly.

"And," pursued Vance, after lighting his cigarette leisurely, "how long a time would you say elapsed between the two shots?"

Greene was obviously annoyed by this cross-examination, but he answered readily.

"Two or three minutes—certainly no longer."

"Still," ruminated Vance, "after you heard the first shot you rose from your bed, donned slippers and robe, went into the hall, felt along the wall to the next room, opened the door cautiously, peered inside, and then crossed the room to the bed—all this, I gather, before the second shot was fired. Is that correct?"

"Certainly it's correct."

"Well, well! As you say, two or three minutes. Yes, at least that. Astonishin'!" Vance turned to Markham. "Really, y' know, old man, I don't wish to influence your judgment, but I rather think you ought to accede to Mr. Greene's request to take a hand in this investigation. I too have a psychic feeling about the case. Something tells me that your eccentric burglar will prove an *ignis fatuus*."

Markham eyed him with meditative curiosity. Not only had Vance's questioning of Greene interested him keenly, but he knew, as a result of long experience, that Vance would not have made the suggestion had he not had a good reason for doing so. I was in no wise surprised, therefore, when he turned to his restive visitor and said:

"Very well, Greene, I'll see what I can do in the matter. I'll probably be at your house early this afternoon. Please see that every one is present, as I'll want to question them."

Greene held out a trembling hand. "The domestic roster—family and servants—will be complete when you arrive."

He strode pompously from the room.

Vance sighed. "Not a nice creature, Markham—not at all a nice creature. I shall never be a politician if it involves an acquaintance with such gentlemen."

Markham seated himself at his desk with a disgruntled air.

"Greene is highly regarded as a social—not a political—decoration," he said maliciously. "He belongs to your totem, not mine."

"Fancy that!" Vance stretched himself luxuriously. "Still, it's you who fascinate him. Intuition tells me he is not overfond of me."

"You did treat him a bit cavalierly. Sarcasm is not exactly a means of endearment."

"But, Markham old thing, I wasn't pining for Chester's affection."

"You think he knows, or suspects, something?"

Vance gazed through the long window into the bleak sky beyond.

"I wonder," he murmured. Then: "Is Chester, by any chance, a typical representative of the Greene family? Of recent years I've done so little mingling with the élite that I'm woefully ignorant of the East Side nabobs."

Markham nodded reflectively.

"I'm afraid he is. The original Greene stock was sturdy, but the present generation seems to have gone somewhat to pot. Old Tobias the Third—Chester's father—was a rugged and, in many ways, admirable character. He appears, however, to have been the last heir of the ancient Greene qualities. What's left of the family has suffered some sort of disintegration. They're not exactly soft, but tainted with patches of incipient decay, like fruit that's lain on the ground too long. Too much money and leisure, I imagine, and too little restraint. On the other hand, there's a certain intellectuality lurking in the new Greenes. They all seem to have good minds, even if futile and misdirected. In fact, I think you underestimate Chester. For all his banalities and effeminate mannerisms, he's far from being as stupid as you regard him."

"*I* regard Chester as stupid! My dear Markham! You wrong me abominably. No, no. There's nothing of the anointed ass about our Chester. He's shrewder even than you think him. Those œdematous eyelids veil a pair of particularly crafty eyes. Indeed, it was largely his studied pose of fatuousness that led me to suggest that you aid and abet in the investigation."

Markham leaned back and narrowed his eyes.

"What's in your mind, Vance?"

"I told you. A psychic seizure—same like Chester's subliminal visitation."

Markham knew, by this elusive answer, that for the moment Vance had no intention of being more definite; and after a moment of scowling silence he turned to the telephone.

"If I'm to take on this case, I'd better find out who has charge of it and get what preliminary information I can."

He called up Inspector Moran, the commanding officer of the Detective Bureau. After a brief conversation he turned to Vance with a smile.

"Your friend, Sergeant Heath, has the case in hand. He happened to be in the office just now, and is coming here immediately."*

In less than fifteen minutes Heath arrived. Despite the fact that he had been up most of the night, he appeared unusually alert and energetic. His broad, pugnacious features were as imperturbable as ever, and his pale-blue eyes held their habitual penetrating intentness. He greeted Markham with an elaborate, though perfunctory, handshake; and then, seeing Vance, relaxed his features into a good-natured smile.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Vance! What have you been up to, sir?"

Vance rose and shook hands with him.

* It was Sergeant Ernest Heath, of the Homicide Bureau, who had been in charge of both the Benson and the Canary cases; and, although he had been openly antagonistic to Vance during the first of these investigations, a curious good-fellowship had later grown up between them. Vance admired the Sergeant's dogged and straightforward qualities; and Heath had developed a keen respect—with certain reservations, however—for Vance's abilities.

"Alas, Sergeant, I've been immersed in the terra-cotta ornamentation of Renaissance façades, and other such trivialities, since I saw you last.* But I'm happy to note that crime is picking up again. It's a deuced drab world without a nice murky murder now and then, don't y' know."

Heath cocked an eye, and turned inquiringly to the District Attorney. He had long since learned how to read between the lines of Vance's badinage.

"It's this Greene case, Sergeant," said Markham.

"I thought so." Heath sat down heavily, and inserted a black cigar between his lips. "But nothing's broken yet. We're rounding up all the regulars, and looking into their alibis for last night. But it'll take several days before the check-up's complete. If the bird who did the job hadn't got scared before he grabbed the swag, we might be able to trace him through the pawnshops and fences. But something rattled him, or he wouldn't have shot up the works the way he did. And that's what makes me think he may be a new one at the racket. If he is, it'll make our job harder." He held a match in cupped hands to his cigar, and puffed furiously. "What did you want to know about the prowl, sir?"

Markham hesitated. The Sergeant's matter-of-fact assumption that a common burglar was the culprit disconcerted him.

"Chester Greene was here," he explained presently; "and he seems convinced that the shooting

* Vance, after reading proof of this sentence, requested me to make mention here of that beautiful volume, "Terra Cotta of the Italian Renaissance," recently published by the National Terra Cotta Society, New York.

was not the work of a thief. He asked me, as a special favor, to look into the matter."

Heath gave a derisive grunt.

"Who but a burglar in a panic would shoot down two women?"

"Quite so, Sergeant." It was Vance who answered. "Still, the lights were turned on in both rooms, though the women had gone to bed an hour before; and there was an interval of several minutes between the two shots."

"I know all that." Heath spoke impatiently. "But if an amachoor did the job, we can't tell exactly what did happen up-stairs there last night. When a bird loses his head——"

"Ah! There's the rub. When a thief loses his head, d'ye see, he isn't apt to go from room to room turning on the lights, even assuming he knows where and how to turn them on. And he certainly isn't going to dally around for several minutes in a black hall between such fantastic operations, especially after he has shot some one and alarmed the house, what? It doesn't look like panic to me; it looks strangely like design. Moreover, why should this precious amateur of yours be cavorting about the boudoirs up-stairs when the loot was in the dining-room below?"

"We'll learn all about that when we've got our man," countered Heath doggedly.

"The point is, Sergeant," put in Markham, "I've given Mr. Greene my promise to look into the matter, and I wanted to get what details I could from you. You understand, of course," he added mollifyingly, "that I shall not interfere with your activities in any

way. Whatever the outcome of the case, your department will receive entire credit."

"Oh, that's all right, sir." Experience had taught Heath that he had nothing to fear in the way of lost *kudos* when working with Markham. "But I don't think, in spite of Mr. Vance's ideas, that you'll find much in the Greene case to warrant attention."

"Perhaps not," Markham admitted. "However, I've committed myself, and I think I'll run out this afternoon and look over the situation, if you'll give me the lie of the land."

"There isn't much to tell." Heath chewed on his cigar cogitatingly. "A Doctor Von Blon—the Greene family physician—phoned Headquarters about midnight. I'd just got in from an up-town stick-up call, and I hopped out to the house with a couple of the boys from the Bureau. I found the two women, like you know, one dead and the other unconscious—both shot. I phoned Doc Doremus,* and then looked the place over. Mr. Feathergill came along and lent a hand; but we didn't find much of anything. The fellow that did the job musta got in by the front door some way, for there was a set of footprints in the snow coming and going, besides Doctor Von Blon's. But the snow was too flaky to get any good impressions. It stopped snowing along about eleven o'clock last night; and there's no doubt that the prints belonged to the burglar, for no one else, except the doctor, had come or gone after the storm."

"An amateur housebreaker with a front-door key

* Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner.

to the Greene mansion," murmured Vance. "Extr'ordin'ry!"

"I'm not saying he had a key, sir," protested Heath. "I'm simply telling you what we found. The door mighta been unlatched by mistake; or some one mighta opened it for him."

"Go on with the story, Sergeant," urged Markham, giving Vance a reproving look.

"Well, after Doc Doremus got there and made an examination of the older woman's body and inspected the younger one's wound, I questioned all the family and the servants—a butler, two maids, and a cook. Chester Greene and the butler were the only ones who had heard the first shot, which was fired about half past eleven. But the second shot roused old Mrs. Greene—her room adjoins the younger daughter's. The rest of the household had slept through all the excitement; but this Chester fellow had woke 'em all up by the time I got there. I talked to all of 'em, but nobody knew anything. After a coupla hours I left a man inside and another outside, and came away. Then I set the usual machinery going; and this morning Captain Dubois went over the place the best he could for finger-prints. Doc Doremus has got the body for an autopsy, and we'll get a report to-night. But there'll be nothing helpful from that quarter. She was fired on from in front at close range—almost a contact shot. And the other woman—the young one—was all powder-marked, and her nightgown was burnt. She was shot from behind.—That's about all the dope."

"Have you been able to get any sort of a statement from the younger one?"

"Not yet. She was unconscious last night, and this morning she was too weak to talk. But the doctor—Von Blon—said we could probably question her this afternoon. We may get something out of her, in case she got a look at the bird before he shot her."

"That suggests something to me, Sergeant." Vance had been listening passively to the recital, but now he drew in his legs, and lifted himself a little. "Did any member of the Greene household possess a gun?"

Heath gave him a sharp look.

"This Chester Greene said he had an old .32 revolver he used to keep in a desk drawer in his bedroom."

"Oh, did he, now? And did you see the gun?"

"I asked him for it, but he couldn't find it. Said he hadn't seen it for years, but that probably it was around somewheres. Promised to dig it up for me to-day."

"Don't hang any fond hopes on his finding it, Sergeant." Vance looked at Markham musingly. "I begin to comprehend the basis of Chester's psychic perturbation. I fear he's a crass materialist after all. . . . Sad, sad."

"You think he missed the gun, and took fright?"

"Well—something like that . . . perhaps. One can't tell. It's deuced confusin'." He turned an indolent eye on the Sergeant. "By the by, what sort of gun did your burglar use?"

Heath gave a gruff, uneasy laugh.

"You score there, Mr. Vance. I've got both bullets—thirty-twos, fired from a revolver, not an automatic. But you're not trying to intimate——"

"Tut, tut, Sergeant. Like Goethe, I'm merely seeking for more illumination, if one may translate *Licht*——"

Markham interrupted this garrulous evasion.

"I'm going to the Greene house after lunch, Sergeant. Can you come along?"

"Sure I can, sir. I was going out anyway."

"Good." Markham brought forth a box of cigars. "Meet me here at two. . . . And take a couple of these *Perfectos* before you go."

Heath selected the cigars, and put them carefully into his breast pocket. At the door he turned with a bantering grin.

"You coming along with us, Mr. Vance—to guide our erring footsteps, as they say?"

"Nothing could keep me away," declared Vance.

CHAPTER III

AT THE GREENE MANSION

(Tuesday, November 9; 2.30 p. m.)

The Greene mansion—as it was commonly referred to by New Yorkers—was a relic of the city's *ancien régime*. It had stood for three generations at the eastern extremity of 53d Street, two of its oriel windows actually overhanging the murky waters of the East River. The lot upon which the house was built extended through the entire block —a distance of two hundred feet—and had an equal frontage on the cross-streets. The character of the neighborhood had changed radically since the early days; but the spirit of commercial advancement had left the domicile of the Greenes untouched. It was an oasis of idealism and calm in the midst of moiling commercial enterprise; and one of the stipulations in old Tobias Greene's last will and testament had been that the mansion should stand intact for at least a quarter of a century after his death, as a monument to him and his ancestors. One of his last acts on earth was to erect a high stone wall about the entire property, with a great double iron gateway opening on 53d Street and a postern-gate for tradesmen giving on 52d Street.

The mansion itself was two and a half stories high, surmounted by gabled spires and chimney clusters. It was what architects call, with a certain intonation

of contempt, a "château flamboyant"; but no derogatory appellation could detract from the quiet dignity and the air of feudal traditionalism that emanated from its great rectangular blocks of gray limestone. The house was sixteenth-century Gothic in style, with more than a suspicion of the new Italian ornament in its parts; and the pinnacles and shelves suggested the Byzantine. But, for all its diversity of detail, it was not flowery, and would have held no deep attraction for the Freemason architects of the Middle Ages. It was not "bookish" in effect; it exuded the very essence of the old.

In the front yard were maples and clipped evergreens, interspersed with hydrangea and lilac-bushes; and at the rear was a row of weeping willows overhanging the river. Along the herring-bone-bond brick walks were high quickset hedges of hawthorn; and the inner sides of the encircling wall were covered with compact espaliers. To the west of the house an asphalt driveway led to a double garage at the rear—an addition built by the newer generation of Greenes. But here too were boxwood hedgerows which cloaked the driveway's modernity.

As we entered the grounds that gray November afternoon an atmosphere of foreboding bleakness seemed to have settled over the estate. The trees and shrubs were all bare, except the evergreens, which were laden with patches of snow. The trellises stood stripped along the walls, like clinging black skeletons; and, save for the front walk, which had been hastily and imperfectly swept, the grounds were piled high with irregular snow-drifts. The gray of the mansion's masonry was almost the color of the

brooding overcast sky; and I felt a premonitory chill of eeriness pass over me as we mounted the shallow steps that led to the high front door, with its pointed pediment above the deeply arched entrance.

Sproot, the butler—a little old man with white hair and a heavily seamed capriform face—admitted us with silent, funereal dignity (he had evidently been apprised of our coming); and we were ushered at once into the great gloomy drawing-room whose heavily curtained windows overlooked the river. A few moments later Chester Greene came in and greeted Markham fulsomely. Heath and Vance and me he included in a single supercilious nod.

"Awfully good of you to come, Markham," he said, with nervous eagerness, seating himself on the edge of a chair and taking out his cigarette-holder. "I suppose you'll want to hold an inquisition first. Whom'll I summon as a starter?"

"We can let that go for the moment," said Markham. "First, I'd like to know something concerning the servants. Tell me what you can about them."

Greene moved restlessly in his chair, and seemed to have difficulty lighting his cigarette.

"There's only four. Big house and all that, but we don't need much help. Julia always acted as housekeeper, and Ada looked after the Mater.—To begin with, there's old Sproot. He's been butler, seneschal, and majordomo for us for thirty years. Regular family retainer—kind you read about in English novels—devoted, loyal, humble, dictatorial, and snooping. And a damned nuisance, I may add. Then there are two maids—one to look after the rooms and the other for general service, though the

women monopolize her, mostly for useless fiddle-faddle. Hemming, the older maid, has been with us ten years. Still wears corsets and fit-easy shoes. Deep-water Baptist, I believe—excruciatingly devout. Barton, the other maid, is young and flighty: thinks she's irresistible, knows a little *table-d'hôte* French, and is the kind that's constantly expecting the males of the family to kiss her behind the door. Sibella picked her out—she's just the kind Sibella would pick out. Been adorning our house and shirking the hard work for about two years. The cook's a stodgy German woman, a typical *Hausfrau*—voluminous bosoms and number-ten feet. Puts in all her spare time writing to distant nieces and nephews in the upper reaches of the Rhine basin somewhere; and boasts that the most fastidious person could eat off her kitchen floor, it's that clean; though I've never tried it. The old man engaged her a year before he died; gave orders she was to remain as long as she liked.—There you have the personnel of the backstairs. Of course, there is a gardener who loafs about the lawn in summer. He hibernates in a speak-easy up Harlem way."

"No chauffeur?"

"A nuisance we dispense with. Julia hated motor-cars, and Rex is afraid to travel in them—squeamish lad, Rex. I drive my own racer, and Sibella's a regular Barney Oldfield. Ada drives, too, when the Mater isn't using her and Sibella's car is idle.—So endeth."

Markham had been making notes as Greene rambled along with his information. At length he put out the cigar he had been smoking.

"Now, if you don't mind, I want to look over the house."

Greene rose with alacrity and led the way into the main lower hall—a vaulted, oak-panelled entrance containing two large carved Flemish tables of the Sambin school, against opposite walls, and several Anglo-Dutch crown-back chairs. A great Daghestan rug stretched along the parqueted floor, its faded colors repeated in the heavy draperies of the archways.

"We have, of course, just come from the drawing-room," explained Greene, with a pompous air. "Back of it, down the hall"—he pointed past the wide marble stairway—"was the governor's library and den—what he called his *sanctum sanctorum*. Nobody's been in it for twelve years. The Mater has kept it locked up ever since the old man died. Sentiment of some kind; though I've often told her she ought to clean the place out and make a billiard-room of it. But you can't move the Mater, once she's got an idea in her head. Try it some time when you're looking for heavy exercise."

He walked across the hall and pulled aside the draperies of the archway opposite to the drawing-room.

"Here's the reception-room, though we don't use it much nowadays. Stuffy, stiff place, and the flue doesn't draw worth a damn. Every time we've built a fire here, we've had to have the cleaners in to remove the soot from the tapestries." He waved his cigarette-holder toward two beautiful Gobelins. "Back there, through those sliding doors, is the dining-room; and farther on are the butler's pantry and

the kitchen where one may eat off the floor. Care to inspect the culinary department?"

"No, I think not," said Markham. "And I'll take the kitchen floor for granted.—Now, can we look at the second floor?"

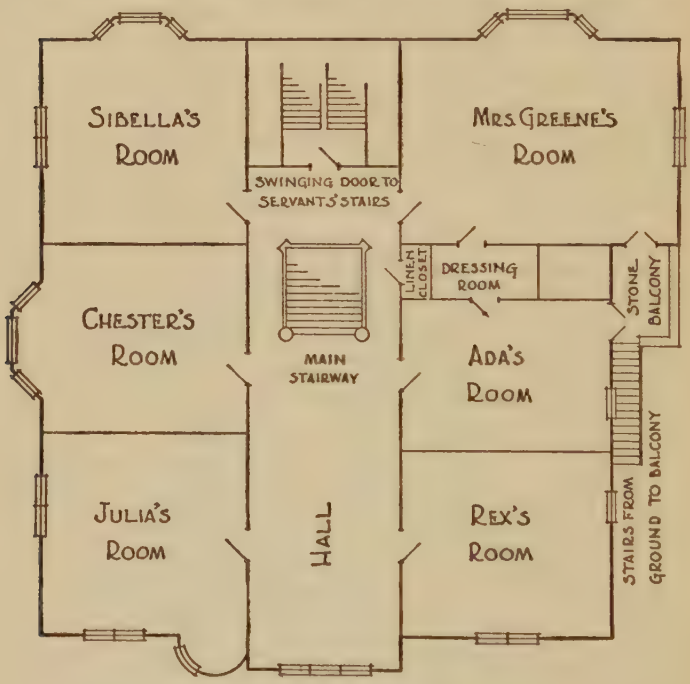
We ascended the main stairs, which led round a piece of marble statuary—a Falguière figure, I think—, and emerged into the upper hall facing the front of the house where three large close-set windows looked out over the bare trees.

The arrangement of the rooms on the second floor was simple and in keeping with the broad four-square architecture of the house; but for the sake of clarification I am embodying in this record a rough diagram of it; for it was the disposition of these rooms that made possible the carrying out of the murderer's hideous and unnatural plot.

There were six bedrooms on the floor—three on either side of the hall, each occupied by a member of the family. At the front of the house, on our left, was the bedroom of Rex Greene, the younger brother. Next to it was the room occupied by Ada Greene; and at the rear were Mrs. Greene's quarters, separated from Ada's by a fair-sized dressing-room through which the two apartments communicated. It will be seen from the diagram that Mrs. Greene's room projected beyond the main western elevation of the house, and that in the L thus formed was a small balustraded stone porch with a narrow flight of stairs, set against the house, leading to the lawn below. French doors opened upon this porch from both Ada's and Mrs. Greene's rooms.

On the opposite side of the hall were the three

rooms occupied by Julia, Chester, and Sibella, Julia's room being at the front of the house, Sibella's at the rear, and Chester's in the centre. None of



PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR.

(For the sake of simplification all bathrooms, clothes-closets, fireplaces, etc., have been omitted.)

these rooms communicated with the other. It might also be noted that the doors to Sibella's and Mrs. Greene's rooms were just behind the main staircase, whereas Chester's and Ada's were directly at the head of the stairs, and Julia's and Rex's farther

toward the front of the house. There was a small linen closet between Ada's room and Mrs. Greene's; and at the rear of the hall were the servants' stairs.

Chester Greene explained this arrangement to us briefly, and then walked up the hall to Julia's room.

"You'll want to look in here first, I imagine," he said, throwing open the door. "Nothing's been touched—police orders. But I can't see what good all that stained bed-linen is to any one. It's a frightful mess."

The room was large and richly furnished with sage-green satin-upholstered furniture of the Marie Antoinette period. Opposite to the door was a canopied bedstead on a dais; and several dark blotches on the embroidered linen gave mute evidence of the tragedy that had been enacted there the night before.

Vance, after noting the dispcsition of the furniture, turned his gaze upon the old-fashioned crystal chandelier.

"Were those the lights that were on when you found your sister last night, Mr. Greene?" he asked casually.

The other nodded with surly annoyance.

"And where, may I ask, is the switch?"

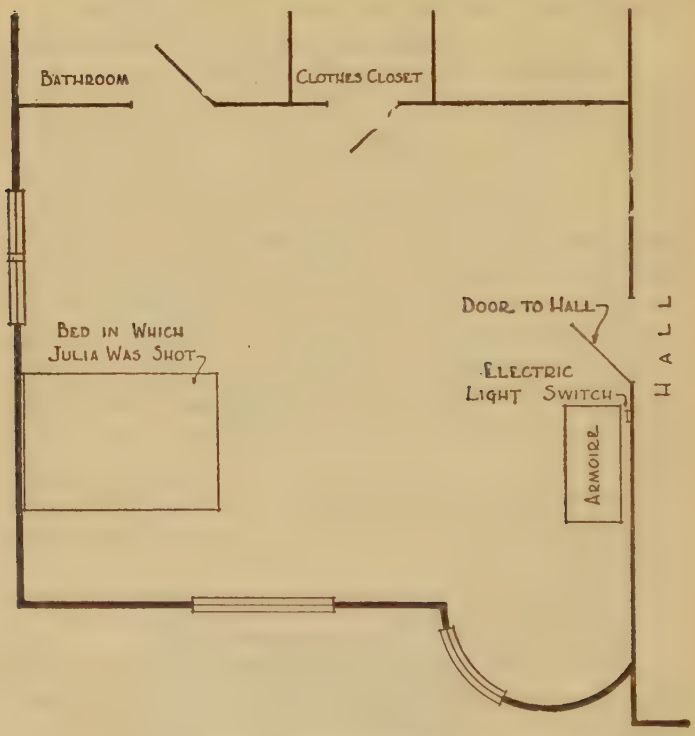
"Behind the end of that cabinet." Greene indifferently indicated a highly elaborated *armoire* near the door.

"Invisible—eh, what?" Vance strolled to the *armoire* and looked behind it. "An amazin' burglar!" Then he went up to Markham and spoke to him in a low voice.

After a moment Markham nodded.

"Greene," he said, "I wish you'd go to your room

and lie down on the bed just as you were last night when you heard the shot. Then, when I tap on the wall, get up and do everything you did last night



PLAN OF JULIA'S BEDROOM.

—in just the way you did it. I want to time you."

The man stiffened, and gave Markham a look of resentful protestation.

"Oh, I say——!" he began. But almost at once

he shrugged compliance and swaggered from the room, closing the door behind him.

Vance took out his watch, and Markham, giving Greene time to reach his room, rapped on the wall. For what seemed an interminable time we waited. Then the door opened slightly, and Greene peered round the casing. Slowly his eyes swept the room; he swung the door further ajar, stepped inside hesitantly, and moved to the bed.

"Three minutes and twenty seconds," announced Vance. "Most disquietin'. . . . What do you imagine, Sergeant, the intruder was doing in the interim of the two shots?"

"How do I know?" retorted Heath. "Probably groping round the hall outside looking for the stairs."

"If he'd groped that length of time he'd have fallen down 'em."

Markham interrupted this discussion with a suggestion that we take a look at the servants' stairway down which the butler had come after hearing the first shot.

"We needn't inspect the other bedrooms just yet," he added, "though we'll want to see Miss Ada's room as soon as the doctor thinks it's advisable. When, by the way, will you know his decision, Greene?"

"He said he'd be here at three. And he's a punctual beggar—a regular fiend for efficiency. He sent a nurse over early this morning, and she's looking after Ada and the Mater now."

"I say, Mr. Greene," interposed Vance, "was your sister Julia in the habit of leaving her door unlocked at night?"

Greene's jaw dropped a little, and his eyes opened wider.

"By Jove—no! Now that you mention it . . . she always locked herself in."

Vance nodded absently, and we passed out into the hall. A thin, swinging baize door hid the servants' stair-well at the rear, and Markham pushed it open.

"Nothing much here to deaden the sound," he observed.

"No," agreed Greene. "And old Sproot's room is right at the head of the steps. He's got good ears, too—too damned good sometimes."

We were about to turn back, when a high-pitched querulous voice issued from the partly open door on our right.

"Is that you, Chester? What's all this disturbance? Haven't I had enough distraction and worry——?"

Greene had gone to his mother's door and put his head inside.

"It's all right, Mater," he said irritably. "It's only the police nosing around."

"The police?" Her voice was contemptuous. "What do they want? Didn't they upset me enough last night? Why don't they go and look for the villain instead of congregating outside my door and annoying me?—So, it's the police." Her tone became vindictive. "Bring them in here at once, and let *me* talk to them. The police, indeed!"

Greene looked helplessly at Markham, who merely nodded; and we entered the invalid's room. It was a spacious chamber, with windows on three sides, furnished elaborately with all manner of conflicting

objects. My first glance took in an East Indian rug, a buhl cabinet, an enormous gilded Buddha, several massive Chinese chairs of carved teak-wood, a faded Persian tapestry, two wrought-iron standard lamps, and a red-and-gold lacquered high-boy. I looked quickly at Vance, and surprised an expression of puzzled interest in his eyes.

In an enormous bed, with neither head-piece nor foot-posts, reclined the mistress of the house, propped up in a semi-recumbent attitude on a sprawling pile of varicolored silken pillows. She must have been between sixty-five and seventy, but her hair was almost black. Her long, chevaline face, though yellowed and wrinkled like ancient parchment, still radiated an amazing vigor: it reminded me of the portraits I had seen of George Eliot. About her shoulders was drawn an embroidered Oriental shawl; and the picture she presented in the setting of that unusual and diversified room was exotic in the extreme. At her side sat a rosy-cheeked imperturbable nurse in a stiff white uniform, making a singular contrast to the woman on the bed.

Chester Greene presented Markham, and let his mother take the rest of us for granted. At first she did not acknowledge the introduction, but, after appraising Markham for a moment, she gave him a nod of resentful forbearance and held out to him a long bony hand.

"I suppose there's no way to avoid having my home overrun in this fashion," she said wearily, assuming an air of great toleration. "I was just endeavoring to get a little rest. My back pains me so much to-day, after all the excitement last night. But what do I matter—an old paralyzed woman like me?

No one considers me anyway, Mr. Markham. But they're perfectly right. We invalids are of no use in the world, are we?"

Markham muttered some polite protestation, to which Mrs. Greene paid not the slightest attention. She had turned, with seemingly great difficulty, to the nurse.

"Fix my pillows, Miss Craven," she ordered impatiently, and then added, in a whining tone: "Even you don't give a thought to my comfort." The nurse complied without a word. "Now, you can go in and sit with Ada until Doctor Von Blon comes.—How is the dear child?" Suddenly her voice had assumed a note of simulated solicitude.

"She's much better, Mrs. Greene." The nurse spoke in a colorless, matter-of-fact tone, and passed quietly into the dressing-room.

The woman on the bed turned complaining eyes upon Markham.

"It's a terrible thing to be a cripple, unable to walk or even stand alone. Both my legs have been hopelessly paralyzed for ten years. Think of it, Mr. Markham: I've spent ten years in this bed and that chair"—she pointed to an invalid's chair in the alcove—"and I can't even move from one to the other unless I'm lifted bodily. But I console myself with the thought that I'm not long for this world; and I try to be patient. It wouldn't be so bad, though, if my children were only more considerate. But I suppose I expect too much. Youth and health give little thought to the old and feeble —it's the way of the world. And so I make the best of it. It's my fate to be a burden to every one."

She sighed and drew the shawl more closely about her.

"You want to ask me some questions perhaps? I don't see what I can tell you that will be of any help, but I'm only too glad to do whatever I can. I haven't slept a wink, and my back has been paining me terribly as a result of all this commotion. But I'm not complaining."

Markham had stood looking at the old lady sympathetically. Indeed, she was a pitiful figure. Her long invalidism and solitude had warped what had probably been a brilliant and generous mind; and she had now become a kind of introspective martyr, with an exaggerated sensitiveness to her affliction. I could see that Markham's instinct was to leave her immediately with a few consoling words; but his sense of duty directed him to remain and learn what he could.

"I don't wish to annoy you more than is absolutely necessary, madam," he said in a kindly voice. "But it might help considerably if you permitted me to put one or two questions."

"What's a little annoyance, more or less?" she asked. "I've long since become used to it. Ask me anything you choose."

Markham bowed with Old World courtesy. "You are very kind, madam." Then, after a moment's pause: "Mr. Greene tells me you did not hear the shot that was fired in your oldest daughter's room, but that the shot in Miss Ada's room wakened you."

"That is so." She nodded slowly. "Julia's room is a considerable distance away—across the hall. But Ada always leaves the doors open between her room and mine in case I should need anything in the

night. Naturally the shot in her room wakened me. . . . Let me see. I must have just fallen to sleep. My back was giving me a great deal of trouble last night; I had suffered all day with it, though I of course didn't tell any of the children about it. Little they care how their paralyzed old mother suffers. . . . And then, just as I had managed to doze off, there came the report, and I was wide-awake again —lying here helpless, unable to move, and wondering what awful thing might be going to happen to me. And no one came to see if I was all right; no one thought of me, alone and defenseless. But then, no one ever thinks of me."

"I'm sure it wasn't any lack of consideration, Mrs. Greene," Markham assured her earnestly. "The situation probably drove everything momentarily from their minds except the two victims of the shooting. —Tell me this: did you hear any other sounds in Miss Ada's room after the shot awakened you?"

"I heard the poor girl fall—at least, it sounded like that."

"But no other noises of any kind? No footsteps, for instance?"

"Footsteps?" She seemed to make an effort to recall her impressions. "No; no footsteps."

"Did you hear the door into the hall open or close, madam?" It was Vance who put the question.

The woman turned her eyes sharply and glared at him.

"No, I heard no door open or close."

"That's rather queer, too, don't you think?" pursued Vance. "The intruder must have left the room."

"I suppose he must have, if he's not there now," she replied acidly, turning again to the District Attorney. "Is there anything else you'd care to know?"

Markham evidently had perceived the impossibility of eliciting any vital information from her.

"I think not," he answered; then added: "You of course heard the butler and your son here enter Miss Ada's room?"

"Oh, yes. They made enough noise doing it—they didn't consider my feelings in the least. That fuss-budget, Sproot, actually cried out for Chester like a hysterical woman; and, from the way he raised his voice over the telephone, one would have thought Doctor Von Blon was deaf. Then Chester had to rouse the whole house for some unknown reason. Oh, there was no peace or rest for me last night, I can tell you! And the police tramped around the house for hours like a drove of wild cattle. It was positively disgraceful. And here was I—a helpless old woman—entirely neglected and forgotten, suffering agonies with my spine."

After a few commiserating banalities Markham thanked her for her assistance, and withdrew. As we passed out and walked toward the stairs I could hear her calling out angrily: "Nurse! Nurse! Can't you hear me? Come at once and arrange my pillows. What do you mean by neglecting me this way . . .?"

The voice trailed off mercifully as we descended to the main hall.

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSING REVOLVER

(Tuesday, November 9; 3 p. m.)

"The Mater's a crabbed old soul," Greene apologized offhandedly when we were again in the drawing-room. "Always grousing about her doting offspring.—Well, where do we go from here?"

Markham seemed lost in thought, and it was Vance who answered.

"Let us take a peep at the servants and hearken to their tale: Sproot for a starter."

Markham roused himself and nodded, and Greene rose and pulled a silken bell-cord near the archway. A minute later the butler appeared and stood at obsequious attention just inside the room. Markham had appeared somewhat at sea and even uninterested during the investigation, and Vance assumed command.

"Sit down, Sproot, and tell us as briefly as possible just what occurred last night."

Sproot came forward slowly, his eyes on the floor, but remained standing before the centre-table.

"I was reading Martial, sir, in my room," he began, lifting his gaze submissively, "when I thought I heard a muffled shot. I wasn't quite sure, for the automobiles in the street back-fire quite loud at times; but at last I said to myself I'd better investigate. I was in negligé, if you understand what I mean, sir; so I slipped on my bath-robe and came

down. I didn't know just where the noise had come from; but when I was half-way down the steps, I heard another shot, and this time it sounded like it came from Miss Ada's room. So I went there at once, and tried the door. It was unlocked, and when I looked in I saw Miss Ada lying on the floor—a very distressing sight, sir. I called to Mr. Chester, and we lifted the poor young lady to the bed. Then I telephoned to Doctor Von Blon."

Vance scrutinized him.

"You were very courageous, Sproot, to brave a dark hall looking for the source of a shot in the middle of the night."

"Thank you, sir," the man answered, with great humility. "I always try to do my duty by the Greene family. I've been with them——"

"We know all that, Sproot." Vance cut him short. "The light was on in Miss Ada's room, I understand, when you opened the door."

"Yes, sir."

"And you saw no one, or heard no noise? No door closing, for instance?"

"No, sir."

"And yet the person who fired the shot must have been somewhere in the hall at the same time you were there."

"I suppose so, sir."

"And he might well have taken a shot at you, too."

"Quite so, sir." Sproot seemed wholly indifferent to the danger he had escaped. "But what will be, will be, sir—if you'll pardon my saying so. And I'm an old man——"

"Tut, tut! You'll probably live a considerable time yet—just how long I can't, of course, say."

"No, sir." Sproot's eyes gazed blankly ahead. "No one understands the mysteries of life and death."

"You're somewhat philosophic, I see," drily commented Vance. Then: "When you phoned to Doctor Von Blon, was he in?"

"No, sir; but the night nurse told me he'd be back any minute, and that she'd send him over. He arrived in less than half an hour."

Vance nodded. "That will be all, thank you, Sproot.—And now please send me *die gnädige Frau Köchin.*"

"Yes, sir." And the old butler shuffled from the room.

Vance's eyes followed him thoughtfully.

"An inveiglin' character," he murmured.

Greene snorted. "*You* don't have to live with him. He'd have said 'Yes, sir,' if you'd spoken to him in Walloon or Volapük. A sweet little playmate to have snooping round the house twenty-four hours a day!"

The cook, a portly, phlegmatic German woman of about forty-five, named Gertrude Mannheim, came in and seated herself on the edge of a chair near the entrance. Vance, after a moment's keen inspection of her, asked:

"Were you born in this country, Frau Mannheim?"

"I was born in Baden," she answered, in flat, rather guttural tones. "I came to America when I was twelve."

"You have not always been a cook, I take it." Vance's voice had a slightly different intonation from that which he had used with Sproot.

At first the woman did not answer.

"No, sir," she said finally. "Only since the death of my husband."

"How did you happen to come to the Greenes?"

Again she hesitated. "I had met Mr. Tobias Greene: he knew my husband. When my husband died there wasn't any money. And I remembered Mr. Greene, and I thought——"

"I understand." Vance paused, his eyes in space. "You heard nothing of what happened here last night?"

"No, sir. Not until Mr. Chester called up the stairs and said for us to get dressed and come down."

Vance rose and turned to the window overlooking the East River.

"That's all, Frau Mannheim. Be so good as to tell the senior maid—Hemming, isn't she?—to come here."

Without a word the cook left us, and her place was presently taken by a tall, slatternly woman, with a sharp, prudish face and severely combed hair. She wore a black, one-piece dress, and heelless vici-kid shoes; and her severity of mien was emphasized by a pair of thick-lensed spectacles.

"I understand, Hemming," began Vance, reseating himself before the fireplace, "that you heard neither shot last night, and learned of the tragedy only when called by Mr. Greene."

The woman nodded with a jerky, emphatic movement.

"I was spared," she said, in a rasping voice. "But the tragedy, as you call it, had to come sooner or later. It was an act of God, if you ask *me*."

"Well, we're not asking you, Hemming; but we're delighted to have your opinion.—So God had a hand in the shooting, eh?"

"He did that!" The woman spoke with religious fervor. "The Greenes are an ungodly, wicked family." She leered defiantly at Chester Greene, who laughed uneasily. "'For I shall rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts—the name, the remnant, and son, and daughter, and nephew'—only there ain't no nephew—'and I will sweep them with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord.'"

Vance regarded her musingly.

"I see you have misread Isaiah. And have you any celestial information as to who was chosen by the Lord to personify the besom?"

The woman compressed her lips. "Who knows?"

"Ah! Who, indeed? . . . But to descend to temporal things: I assume you weren't surprised at what happened last night?"

"I'm never surprised at the mysterious workin's of the Almighty."

Vance sighed. "You may return to your Scriptural perusings, Hemming. Only, I wish you'd pause *en route* and tell Barton we crave her presence here."

The woman rose stiffly and passed from the room like an animated ramrod.

Barton came in, obviously frightened. But her fear was insufficient to banish completely her instinctive coquetry. A certain coyness showed through

the alarmed glance she gave us, and one hand automatically smoothed back the chestnut hair over her ear. Vance adjusted his monocle.

"You really should wear Alice blue, Barton," he advised her seriously. "Much more becoming than cerise to your olive complexion."

The girl's apprehensiveness relaxed, and she gave Vance a puzzled, kittenish look.

"But what I particularly wanted you to come here for," he went on, "was to ask you if Mr. Greene has ever kissed you."

"Which—Mr. Greene?" she stammered, completely disconcerted.

Chester had, at Vance's question, jerked himself erect in his chair and started to splutter an irate objection. But articulation failed him, and he turned to Markham with speechless indignation.

The corners of Vance's mouth twitched. "It really doesn't matter, Barton," he said quickly.

"Aren't you going to ask me any questions about —what happened last night?" the girl asked, with obvious disappointment.

"Oh! Do you know anything about what happened?"

"Why, no," she admitted. "I was asleep——"

"Exactly. Therefore, I sha'n't bother you with questions." He dismissed her good-naturedly.

"Damn it, Markham, I protest!" cried Greene, when Barton had left us. "I call this—this gentleman's levity rotten-bad taste—damme if I don't!"

Markham, too, was annoyed at the frivolous line of interrogation Vance had taken.

"I can't see what's to be gained by such futile

inquiries," he said, striving to control his irritation.

"That's because you're still holding to the burglar theory," Vance replied. "But if, as Mr. Greene thinks, there is another explanation of last night's crime, then it's essential to acquaint ourselves with the conditions existing here. And it's equally essential not to rouse the suspicions of the servants. Hence, my apparent irrelevancies. I'm trying to size up the various human factors we have to deal with; and I think I've done uncommonly well. Several rather interesting possibilities have developed."

Before Markham could reply Sproot passed the archway and opened the front door to some one whom he greeted respectfully. Greene immediately went into the hall.

"Hallo, doc," we heard him say. "Thought you'd be along pretty soon. The District Attorney and his *entourage* are here, and they'd like to talk to Ada. I told 'em you said it might be all right this afternoon."

"I'll know better when I've seen Ada," the doctor replied. He passed on hurriedly, and we heard him ascending the stairs.

"It's Von Blon," announced Greene, returning to the drawing-room. "He'll let us know anon how Ada's coming along." There was a callous note in his voice, which, at the time, puzzled me.

"How long have you known Doctor Von Blon?" asked Vance.

"How long?" Greene looked surprised. "Why, all my life. Went to the old Beekman Public School with him. His father—old Doctor Veranus Von Blon—brought all the later Greenes into the

world; family physician, spiritual adviser, and all that sort of thing, from time immemorial. When Von Blon, senior, died we embraced the son as a matter of course. And young Arthur's a shrewd lad, too. Knows his pharmacopœia. Trained by the old man, and topped off his medical education in Germany."

Vance nodded negligently.

"While we're waiting for Doctor Von Blon, suppose we have a chat with Miss Sibella and Mr. Rex. Your brother first, let us say."

Greene looked to Markham for confirmation; then rang for Sproot.

Rex Greene came immediately upon being summoned.

"Well, what do you want now?" he asked, scanning our faces with nervous intensity. His voice was peevish, almost whining, and there were certain overtones in it which recalled the fretful complaining voice of Mrs. Greene.

"We merely want to question you about last night," answered Vance soothingly. "We thought it possible you could help us."

"What help can I give you?" Rex asked sullenly, slumping into a chair. He gave his brother a sneering look. "Chester's the only one round here who seems to have been awake."

Rex Greene was a short, sallow youth with narrow, stooping shoulders and an abnormally large head set on a neck which appeared almost emaciated. A shock of straight hair hung down over his bulging forehead, and he had a habit of tossing it back with a jerky movement of the head. His small, shifty eyes, shielded by enormous tortoise-rimmed glasses,

seemed never to be at rest; and his thin lips were constantly twitching as with a *tic douloureux*. His chin was small and pointed, and he held it drawn in, emphasizing its lack of prominence. He was not a pleasant spectacle, and yet there was something in the man—an overdeveloped studiousness, perhaps—that gave the impression of unusual potentialities. I once saw a juvenile chess wizard who had the same cranial formations and general facial cast.

Vance appeared introspective, but I knew he was absorbing every detail of the man's appearance. At length he laid down his cigarette, and focussed his eyes languidly on the desk-lamp.

"You say you slept throughout the tragedy last night. How do you account for that remarkable fact, inasmuch as one of the shots was fired in the room next to yours?"

Rex hitched himself forward to the edge of his chair, and turned his head from side to side, carefully avoiding our eyes.

"I haven't tried to account for it," he returned, with angry resentment; but withal he seemed unstrung and on the defensive. Then he hurried on: "The walls in this house are pretty thick anyway, and there are always noises in the street. . . . Maybe my head was buried under the covers."

"You'd certainly have buried your head under the covers if you'd heard the shot," commented Chester, with no attempt to disguise his contempt for his brother.

Rex swung round, and would have retorted to the accusation had not Vance put his next question immediately.

"What's your theory of the crime, Mr. Greene? You've heard all the details and you know the situation."

"I thought the police had settled on a burglar." The youth's eyes rested shrewdly on Heath. "Wasn't that your conclusion?"

"It was, and it is," declared the Sergeant, who, until now, had preserved a bored silence. "But your brother here seems to think otherwise."

"So Chester thinks otherwise." Rex turned to his brother with an expression of feline dislike. "Maybe Chester knows all about it." There was no mistaking the implication in his words.

Vance once more stepped into the breach.

"Your brother has told us all he knows. Just at present we're concerned with how much *you* know." The severity of his manner caused Rex to shrink back in his chair. His lips twitched more violently, and he began fidgeting with the braided frog of his smoking-jacket. I noticed then for the first time that he had short rachitic hands with bowed and thickened phalanges.

"You are sure you heard no shot?" continued Vance ominously.

"I've told you a dozen times I didn't!" His voice rose to a falsetto, and he gripped the arms of his chair with both hands.

"Keep calm, Rex," admonished Chester. "You'll be having another of your spells."

"To hell with you!" the youth shouted. "How many times have I got to tell them I don't know anything about it?"

"We merely want to make doubly sure on all

points," Vance told him pacifyingly. "And you certainly wouldn't want your sister's death to go unavenged through any lack of perseverance on our part."

Rex relaxed slightly, and took a deep inspiration.

"Oh, I'd tell you anything I knew," he said, running his tongue over his dry lips. "But I always get blamed for everything that happens in this house —that is, Ada and I do. And as for avenging Julia's death: that doesn't appeal to me nearly so much as punishing the dog that shot Ada. She has a hard enough time of it here under normal conditions. Mother keeps her in the house waiting on her as if she were a servant."

Vance nodded understandingly. Then he rose and placed his hand sympathetically on Rex's shoulder. This gesture was so unlike him I was completely astonished; for, despite his deep-seated humanism, Vance seemed always ashamed of any outward show of feeling, and sought constantly to repress his emotions.

"Don't let this tragedy upset you too much, Mr. Greene," he said reassuringly. "And you may be certain that we'll do everything in our power to find and punish the person who shot Miss Ada.—We won't bother you any more now."

Rex got up almost eagerly and drew himself together.

"Oh, that's all right." And with a covertly triumphant glance at his brother, he left the room.

"Rex is a queer bird," Chester remarked, after a short silence. "He spends most of his time reading and working out abstruse problems in mathe-

matics and astronomy. Wanted to stick a telescope through the attic roof, but the Mater drew the line. He's an unhealthy beggar, too. I tell him he doesn't get enough fresh air, but you see his attitude toward me. Thinks I'm weak-minded because I play golf."

"What were the spells you spoke about?" asked Vance. "Your brother looks as if he might be epileptic."

"Oh, no; nothing like that; though I've seen him have convulsive seizures when he got in a specially violent tantrum. He gets excited easily and flies off the handle. Von Blon says it's hyperneurasthenia—whatever that is. He goes ghastly pale when he's worked up, and has a kind of trembling fit. Says things he's sorry for afterward. Nothing serious, though. What he needs is exercise—a year on a ranch roughing it, without his infernal books and compasses and T-squares."

"I suppose he's more or less a favorite with your mother." (Vance's remark recalled a curious similarity of temperament betwen the two I had felt vaguely as Rex talked.)

"More or less." Chester nodded ponderously. "He's the pet in so far as the Mater's capable of petting any one but herself. Anyway, she's never ragged Rex as much as the rest of us."

Again Vance went to the great window above the East River, and stood looking out. Suddenly he turned.

"By the by, Mr. Greene, did you find your revolver?" His tone had changed; his ruminative mood had gone.

Chester gave a start, and cast a swift glance at Heath, who had now become attentive.

"No, by Gad, I haven't," he admitted, fumbling in his pocket for his cigarette-holder. "Funny thing about that gun, too. Always kept it in my desk drawer—though, as I told this gentleman when he mentioned it"—he pointed his holder at Heath as if the other had been an inanimate object—"I don't remember actually having seen it for years. But, even so, where the devil could it have gone? Damme, it's mysterious. Nobody round here would touch it. The maids don't go in the drawers when they're cleaning the room—I'm lucky if they make the bed and dust the top of the furniture. Damned funny what became of it."

"Did you take a good look for it to-day, like you said?" asked Heath, thrusting his head forward belligerently. Why, since he held to the burglar theory, he should assume a bulldozing manner, I couldn't imagine. But whenever Heath was troubled, he was aggressive; and any loose end in an investigation troubled him deeply.

"Certainly, I looked for it," Chester replied, haughtily indignant. "I went through every room and closet and drawer in the house. But it's completely disappeared. . . . Probably got thrown out by mistake in one of the annual house-cleanings."

"That's possible," agreed Vance. "What sort of a revolver was it?"

"An old Smith & Wesson .32." Chester appeared to be trying to refresh his memory. "Mother-of-pearl handle: some scroll-engraving on the barrel—I don't recall exactly. I bought it fifteen years ago—maybe longer—when I went camping one summer in the Adirondacks. Used it for target practice.

Then I got tired of it, and stuck it away in a drawer behind a lot of old cancelled checks."

"Was it in good working order then?"

"As far as I know. Fact is, it worked stiff when I got it, and I had the sear filed down, so it was practically a hair-trigger affair. The slightest touch sent it off. Better for shooting targets that way."

"Do you recall if it was loaded when you put it away?"

"Couldn't say. Might have been. It's been so long——"

"Were there any cartridges for it in your desk?"

"Now, that I can answer you positively. There wasn't a loose cartridge in the place."

Vance reseated himself.

"Well, Mr. Greene, if you happen to run across the revolver you will, of course, let Mr. Markham or Sergeant Heath know."

"Oh, certainly. With pleasure." Chester's assurance was expressed with an air of magnanimity.

Vance glanced at his watch.

"And now, seeing that Doctor Von Blon is still with his patient, I wonder if we could see Miss Sibella for a moment."

Chester got up, obviously relieved that the subject of the revolver had been disposed of, and went to the bell-cord beside the archway. But he arrested his hand in the act of reaching for it.

"I'll fetch her myself," he said, and hurried from the room.

Markham turned to Vance with a smile.

"Your prophecy about the non-reappearance of the gun has, I note, been temporarily verified."

"And I'm afraid that fancy weapon with the hair-trigger never will appear—at least, not until this miserable business is cleaned up." Vance was unwontedly sober; his customary levity had for the moment deserted him. But before long he lifted his eyebrows mockingly, and gave Heath a chaffing look.

"Perchance the Sergeant's predacious neophyte made off with the revolver—became fascinated with the scrollwork, or entranced with the pearl handle."

"It's quite possible the revolver disappeared in the way Greene said it did," Markham submitted. "In any event, I think you unduly emphasized the matter."

"Sure he did, Mr. Markham," growled Heath. "And, what's more, I can't see that all this repartee with the family is getting us anywheres. I had 'em all on the carpet last night when the shooting was hot; and I'm telling you they don't know nothing about it. This Ada Greene is the only person round here I want to talk to. There's a chance she can give us a tip. If her lights were on when the burglar got in her room, she maybe got a good look at him."

"Sergeant," said Vance, shaking his head sadly, "you're getting positively morbid on the subject of that mythical burglar."

Markham inspected the end of his cigar thoughtfully.

"No, Vance. I'm inclined to agree with the Sergeant. It appears to me that you're the one with the morbid imagination. I let you inveigle me into this inquiry too easily. That's why I've kept in the

background and left the floor to you. Ada Greene's our only hope of help here."

"Oh, for your trusting, forthright mind!" Vance sighed and shifted his position restlessly. "I say, our psychic Chester is taking a dashed long time to fetch Sibella."

At that moment there came a sound of footsteps on the marble stairs, and a few seconds later Sibella Greene, accompanied by Chester, appeared in the archway.

CHAPTER V

HOMICIDAL POSSIBILITIES

(Tuesday, November 9; 3.30 p. m.)

Sibella entered with a firm, swinging gait, her head held high, her eyes sweeping the assemblage with bold interrogation. She was tall and of slender, athletic build, and, though she was not pretty, there was a cold, chiselled attractiveness in her lineaments that held one's attention. Her face was at once vivid and intense; and there was a hauteur in her expression amounting almost to arrogance. Her dark, crisp hair was bobbed but not waved, and the severity of its lines accentuated the overdecisive cast of her features. Her hazel eyes were wide-spaced beneath heavy, almost horizontal eyebrows; her nose was straight and slightly prominent, and her mouth was large and firm, with a suggestion of cruelty in its thin lips. She was dressed simply, in a dark sport suit cut extremely short, silk-wool stockings of a heather mixture, and low-heeled mannish Oxfords.

Chester presented the District Attorney to her as an old acquaintance, and permitted Markham to make the other introductions.

"I suppose you know, Mr. Markham, why Chet likes you," she said, in a peculiarly plangent voice. "You're one of the few persons at the Marylebone Club that he can beat at golf."

She seated herself before the centre-table, and crossed her knees comfortably.

"I wish you'd get me a cigarette, Chet." Her tone made the request an imperative.

Vance rose at once and held out his case.

"Do try one of these *Régies*, Miss Greene," he urged in his best drawing-room manner. "If you say you don't like them, I shall immediately change my brand."

"Rash man!" Sibella took a cigarette and permitted Vance to light it for her. Then she settled back in her chair and gave Markham a quizzical look. "Quite a wild party we pulled here last night, wasn't it? We've never had so much commotion in the old mansion. And it was just my luck to sleep soundly through it all." She made an aggrieved *moue*. "Chet didn't call me till it was all over. Just like him—he has a nasty disposition."

Somehow her flippancy did not shock me as it might have done in a different type of person. But Sibella struck me as a girl who, though she might feel things keenly, would not permit any misfortune to get the better of her; and I put her apparent callousness down to a dogged, if perverted, courageousness.

Markham, however, resented her attitude.

"One cannot blame Mr. Greene for not taking the matter lightly," he reproved her. "The brutal murder of a defenseless woman and the attempted murder of a young girl hardly come under the head of diversion."

Sibella looked at him reproachfully. "You know, Mr. Markham, you sound exactly like the Mother Superior of the stuffy convent I was confined in for two years." She became suddenly grave. "Why

draw a long face over something that's happened and can't be helped? Anyway, Julia never sought to brighten her little corner. She was always crabbed and faultfinding, and her good deeds wouldn't fill a book. It may be unsisterly to say it, but she's not going to be missed so dreadfully. Chet and I are certainly not going to pine away."

"And what about the brutal shooting of your other sister?" Markham was with difficulty controlling his indignation.

Sibella's eyelids narrowed perceptibly, and the lines of her face became set. But she erased the expression almost at once.

"Well, Ada's going to recover, isn't she?" Despite her effort, she was unable to keep a certain hardness out of her voice. "She'll have a nice long rest, and a nurse to wait on her. Am I expected to weep copiously because of baby sister's escape?"

Vance, who had been closely watching this clash between Sibella and Markham, now took a hand in the conversation.

"My dear Markham, I can't see what Miss Greene's sentiments have to do with the matter. Her attitude may not be strictly in accord with the prescribed conduct for young ladies on such occasions, but I feel sure she has excellent reasons for her point of view. Let us give over moralizing, and seek Miss Greene's assistance instead."

The girl darted him an amused, appreciative glance; and Markham made a gesture of indifferent acquiescence. It was plain that he regarded the present inquiry as of little importance.

Vance gave the girl an engaging smile.

"It's really my fault, Miss Greene, that we are intruding here," he apologized. "It was I, d' ye see, that urged Mr. Markham to look into the case after your brother had expressed his disbelief in the burglar theory."

She nodded understandingly. "Oh, Chet sometimes has excellent hunches. It's one of his very few merits."

"You, too, I gather, are sceptical in regard to the burglar?"

"Sceptical?" She gave a short laugh. "I'm downright suspicious. I don't know any burglars, though I'd dearly love to meet one; but I simply can't bring my flighty brain to picture them going about their fascinating occupation the way our little entertainer did last night."

"You positively thrill me," declared Vance. "Y' see, our minority ideas coincide perfectly."

"Did Chet give you any intelligible explanation for his opinion?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not. He was inclined to lay his feelings to metaphysical causes. His conviction was due, I took it, to some kind of psychic visitation. He knew, but could not explain: he was sure, but had no proof. It was most indefinite—a bit esoteric, in fact."

"I'd never suspect Chet of spiritualistic leanings." She shot her brother a tantalizing look. "He's really deadly commonplace, when you get to know him."

"Oh, cut it, Sib," objected Chester irritably. "You yourself had a spasm this morning when I told you the police were hot-footing it after a burglar."

Sibella made no answer. With a slight toss of the head she leaned over and threw her cigarette into the grate.

"By the by, Miss Greene"—Vance spoke casually —"there has been considerable mystery about the disappearance of your brother's revolver. It has completely vanished from his desk drawer. I wonder if you have seen it about the house anywhere."

At his mention of the gun Sibella stiffened slightly. Her eyes took on an expression of intentness, and the corners of her mouth lifted into a faintly ironical smile.

"Chet's revolver has gone, has it?" She put the question colorlessly, as if her thoughts were elsewhere. "No . . . I haven't seen it." Then, after a momentary pause: "But it was in Chet's desk last week."

Chester heaved himself forward angrily.

"What were you doing in my desk last week?" he demanded.

"Don't wax apoplectic," the girl said carelessly. "I wasn't looking for love missives. I simply couldn't imagine you in love, Chet. . . ." The idea seemed to amuse her. "I was only looking for that old emerald stick-pin you borrowed and never returned."

"It's at the club," he explained sulkily.

"Is it, really! Well, I didn't find it anyway; but I did see the revolver.—Are you quite sure it's gone?"

"Don't be absurd," the man growled. "I've searched everywhere for it. . . . Including your room," he added vengefully.

"Oh, you would! But why did you admit having it in the first place?" Her tone was scornful. "Why involve yourself unnecessarily?"

Chester shifted uneasily.

"This gentleman"—he again pointed impersonally to Heath—"asked me if I owned a revolver, and I told him 'yes.' If I hadn't, some of the servants or one of my loving family would have told him. And I thought the truth was best."

Sibella smiled satirically.

"My older brother, you observe, is a model of all the old-fashioned virtues," she remarked to Vance. But she was obviously *distraite*. The revolver episode had somewhat shaken her self-assurance.

"You say, Miss Greene, that the burglar idea does not appeal to you." Vance was smoking languidly with half-closed eyes. "Can you think of any other explanation for the tragedy?"

The girl raised her head and regarded him calculatingly.

"Because I don't happen to believe in burglars that shoot women and sneak away without taking anything, it doesn't mean that I can suggest alternatives. I'm not a policewoman—though I've often thought it would be jolly good sport—and I had a vague idea it was the business of the police to run down criminals.—You don't believe in the burglar either, Mr. Vance, or you wouldn't have followed up Chet's hunch. Who do *you* think ran amuck here last night?"

"My dear girl!" Vance raised a protesting hand. "If I had the foggiest idea I wouldn't be annoying you with impertinent questions. I'm plodding with leaden feet in a veritable bog of ignorance."

He spoke negligently, but Sibella's eyes were clouded with suspicion. Presently, however, she laughed gaily and held out her hand.

"Another *Régie, monsieur.* I was on the verge of becoming serious; and I simply mustn't become serious. It's so frightfully boring. Besides, it gives one wrinkles. And I'm much too young for wrinkles."

"Like Ninon de L'Enclos, you'll aways be too young for wrinkles," rejoined Vance, holding a match to her cigarette. "But perhaps you can suggest, without becoming too serious, some one who might have had a reason for wanting to kill your two sisters."

"Oh, as for that, I'd say we'd all come under suspicion. We're not an ideal home circle, by any means. In fact, the Greenes are a queer collection. We don't love one another the way a perfectly nice and proper family should. We're always at each other's throats, bickering and fighting about something or other. It's rather a mess—this ménage. It's a wonder to me murder hasn't been done long before. And we've all got to live here until 1932, or go it on our own; and, of course, none of us could make a decent living. A sweet paternal heritage!"*

She smoked moodily for a few moments.

"Yes, any one of us had ample reason to be murderously inclined toward all the others. Chet there would strangle me now if he didn't think the nervous

* Sibella was here referring to Tobias Greene's will, which stipulated not only that the Greene mansion should be maintained intact for twenty-five years, but that the legatees should live on the estate during that time or become disinherited.

aftermath of the act would spoil his golf—wouldn't you, Chet dear? Rex regards us all as inferiors, and probably considers himself highly indulgent and altruistic not to have murdered us all long ago. And the only reason mother hasn't killed us is that she's paralyzed and can't manage it. Julia, too, for that matter, could have seen us all boiled in oil without turning a hair. And as for Ada"—her brows contracted and an extraordinary ferocity crept into her eyes—"she'd dearly love to see us all exterminated. She's not really one of us, and she hates us. Nor would I myself have any scruples about doing away with the rest of my fond family. I've thought of it often, but I could never decide on a nice thorough method." She flicked her cigarette ash on the floor. "So there you are. If you're looking for possibilities you have them galore. There's no one under this ancestral roof who couldn't qualify."

Though her words were meant to be satirical, I could not help feeling that a sombre, terrible truth underlay them. Vance, though apparently listening with amusement, had, I knew, been absorbing every inflection of her voice and play of expression, in an effort to relate the details of her sweeping indictment to the problem in hand.

"At any rate," he remarked offhandedly, "you are an amazingly frank young woman. However, I sha'n't recommend your arrest just yet. I haven't a particle of evidence against you, don't y' know. Annoyin', ain't it?"

"Oh, well," sighed the girl, in mock disappointment, "you may pick up a clew later on. There'll probably be another death or two around here before

long. I'd hate to think the murderer would give up the job with so little really accomplished."

At this point Doctor Von Blon entered the drawing-room. Chester rose to greet him, and the formalities of introduction were quickly over. Von Blon bowed with reserved cordiality; but I noted that his manner to Sibella, while pleasant, was casual in the extreme. I wondered a little about this, but I recalled that he was an old friend of the family and probably took many of the social amenities for granted.

"What have you to report, doctor?" asked Markham. "Will we be able to question the young lady this afternoon?"

"I hardly think there'd be any harm in it," Von Blon returned, seating himself beside Chester. "Ada has only a little reaction fever now, though she's suffering from shock, and is pretty weak from loss of blood."

Doctor Von Blon was a suave, smooth-faced man of forty, with small, almost feminine features and an air of unwavering amiability. His urbanity struck me as too artificial—"professional" is perhaps the word—and there was something of the ambitious egoist about him. But I was far more attracted than repelled by him.

Vance watched him attentively as he spoke. He was more anxious even than Heath, I think, to question the girl.

"It was not a particularly serious wound, then?" Markham asked.

"No, not serious," the doctor assured him; "though it barely missed being fatal. Had the shot

gone an inch deeper it would have torn across the lung. It was a very narrow escape."

"As I understand it," interposed Vance, "the bullet travelled transversely over the left scapular region."

Von Blon inclined his head in agreement.

"The shot was obviously aimed at the heart from the rear," he explained, in his soft, modulated voice. "But Ada must have turned slightly to the right just as the revolver exploded; and the bullet, instead of going directly into her body, ploughed along the shoulder-blade at the level of the third dorsal vertebra, tore the capsular ligament, and lodged in the deltoid." He indicated the location of the deltoid on his own left arm.

"She had," suggested Vance, "apparently turned her back on her assailant and attempted to run away; and he had followed her and placed the revolver almost against her back.—Is that your interpretation of it, doctor?"

"Yes, that would seem to be the situation. And, as I said, at the crucial moment she veered a little, and thus saved her life."

"Would she have fallen immediately to the floor, despite the actual superficiality of the wound?"

"It's not unlikely. Not only would the pain have been considerable, but the shock must be taken into account. Ada—or, for that matter, any woman—might have fainted at once."

"And it's a reasonable presumption," pursued Vance, "that her assailant would have taken it for granted that the shot had been fatal."

"We may readily assume that to be the case."

Vance smoked a moment, his eyes averted.

"Yes," he agreed, "I think we may assume that. —And another point suggests itself. Since Miss Ada was in front of the dressing-table, a considerable distance from the bed, and since the weapon was held practically against her, the encounter would seem to take on the nature of a deliberate attack, rather than a haphazard shot fired by some one in a panic."

Von Blon looked shrewdly at Vance, and then turned a questioning gaze upon Heath. For a moment he was silent, as if weighing his reply, and when he spoke it was with guarded reserve.

"Of course, one might interpret the situation that way. Indeed, the facts would seem to indicate such a conclusion. But, on the other hand, the intruder might have been very close to Ada; and the fact that the bullet entered her left shoulder at a particularly vital point may have been the purest accident."

"Quite true," conceded Vance. "However, if the idea of premeditation is to be abrogated, we must account for the fact that the lights were on in the room when the butler entered immediately after the shooting."

Von Blon showed the keenest astonishment at this statement.

"The lights were on? That's most remarkable!" His brow crinkled into a perplexed frown, and he appeared to be assimilating Vance's information. "Still," he argued, "that very fact may account for the shooting. If the intruder had entered a lighted room he may have fired at the occupant lest his description be given to the police later."

"Oh, quite!" murmured Vance. "Anyway, let us

hope we'll learn the explanation when we've seen and spoken to Miss Ada."

"Well, why don't we get to it?" grumbled Heath, whose ordinarily inexhaustible store of patience had begun to run low.

"You're so hasty, Sergeant," Vance chided him. "Doctor Von Blon has just told us that Miss Ada is very weak; and anything we can learn beforehand will spare her just so many questions."

"All I want to find out," expostulated Heath, "is if she got a look at the bird that shot her and can give me a description of him."

"That being the case, Sergeant, I fear you are doomed to have your ardent hopes dashed to the ground."

Heath chewed viciously on his cigar; and Vance turned again to Von Blon.

"There's one other question I'd like to ask, doctor. How long was it after Miss Ada had been wounded before you examined her?"

"The butler's already told us, Mr. Vance," interposed Heath impatiently. "The doctor got here in half an hour."

"Yes, that's about right." Von Blon's tone was smooth and matter-of-fact. "I was unfortunately out on a call when Sproot phoned, but I returned about fifteen minutes later, and hurried right over. Luckily I live near here—in East 48th Street."

"And was Miss Ada still unconscious when you arrived?"

"Yes. She had lost considerable blood. The cook, however, had put a towel-compress on the wound, which of course helped."

Vance thanked him and rose.

"And now, if you'll be good enough to take us to your patient, we'll be very grateful."

"As little excitement as possible, you understand," admonished Von Blon, as he got up and led the way up-stairs.

Sibella and Chester seemed undecided about accompanying us; but as I turned into the hall I saw a look of interrogation flash between them, and a moment later they too joined us in the upper hall.

CHAPTER VI

AN ACCUSATION

(Tuesday, November 9; 4 p. m.)

Ada Greene's room was simply, almost severely, furnished; but there was a neatness about it, combined with little touches of feminine decoration, that reflected the care its occupant had bestowed upon it. To the left, near the door that led into the dressing-room communicating with Mrs. Greene's chamber, was a single mahogany bed of simple design; and beyond it was the door that opened upon the stone balcony. To the right, beside the window, stood the dressing-table; and on the amber-colored Chinese rug before it there showed a large irregular brown stain where the wounded girl had lain. In the centre of the right wall was an old Tudor fireplace with a high oak-panelled mantel.

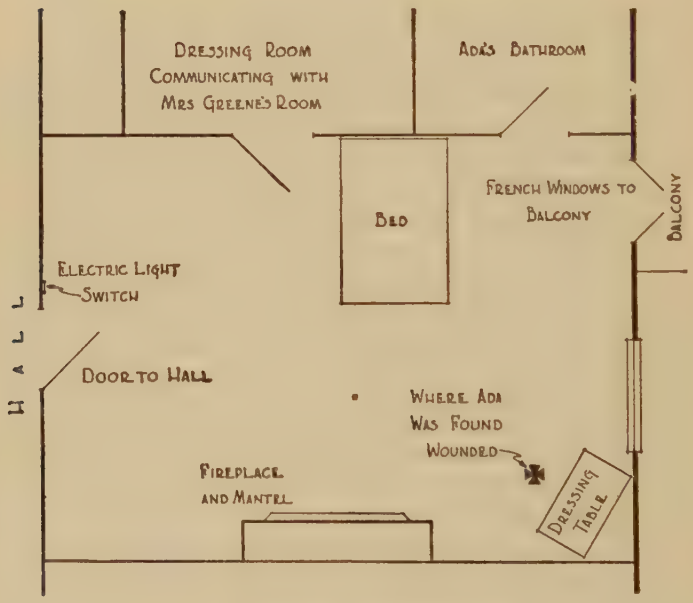
As we entered, the girl in the bed looked at us inquisitively, and a slight flush colored her pale cheeks. She lay on her right side, facing the door, her bandaged shoulder supported by pillows, and her left hand, slim and white, resting upon the blue-figured coverlet. A remnant of her fear of the night before seemed still to linger in her blue eyes.

Doctor Von Blon went to her and, sitting down on the edge of the bed, placed his hand on hers. His manner was at once protective and impersonal.

"These gentlemen want to ask you a few questions,

Ada," he explained, with a reassuring smile; "and as you were so much stronger this afternoon I brought them up. Do you feel equal to it?"

She nodded her head wearily, her eyes on the doctor.



PLAN OF ADA'S BEDROOM.

Vance, who had paused by the mantel to inspect the hand-carving of the quadræ, now turned and approached the bed.

"Sergeant," he said, "if you don't mind, let me talk to Miss Greene first."

Heath realized, I think, that the situation called for tact and delicacy; and it was typical of the man's fundamental bigness that he at once stepped aside.

"Miss Greene," said Vance, in a quiet, genial voice, drawing up a small chair beside the bed, "we're very anxious to clear up the mystery about last night's tragedy; and, as you are the only person who is in a position to help us, we want you to recall for us, as nearly as you can, just what happened."

The girl took a deep breath.

"It—it was awful," she said weakly, looking straight ahead. "After I had gone to sleep—I don't know just what time—something woke me up. I can't tell you what it was; but all of a sudden I was wide awake, and the strangest feeling came over me. . . ." She closed her eyes, and an involuntary shudder swept her body. "It was as though some one were in the room, threatening me. . . ." Her voice faded away into an awed silence.

"Was the room dark?" Vance asked gently.

"Pitch-dark." Slowly she turned her eyes to him. "That's why I was so frightened. I couldn't see anything, and I imagined there was a ghost—or evil spirit—near me. I tried to call out, but I couldn't make a sound. My throat felt dry and—and stiff."

"Typical constriction due to fright, Ada," explained Von Blon. "Many people can't speak when they're frightened.—Then what happened?"

"I lay trembling for a few minutes, but not a sound came from anywhere in the room. Yet I knew —I *knew*—somebody, or something, that meant to harm me was here. . . . At last I forced myself to get up—very quietly. I wanted to turn on the lights—the darkness frightened me so. And after a while I was standing up beside the bed here. Then, for the first time, I could see the dim light of the windows; and it made things seem more real some-

how. So I began to grope my way toward the electric switch there by the door. I had only gone a little way when . . . a hand . . . touched me. . . ."

Her lips were trembling, and a look of horror came into her wide-open eyes.

"I—I was so stunned," she struggled on, "I hardly know what I did. Again I tried to scream, but I couldn't even open my lips. And then I turned and ran away from the—the thing—toward the window. I had almost reached it when I heard some one coming after me—a queer, shuffling sound—and I knew it was the end. . . . There was an awful noise, and something hot struck the back of my shoulder. I was suddenly nauseated; the light of the window disappeared, and I felt myself sinking down—deep. . . ."

When she ceased speaking a tense silence fell on the room. Her account, for all its simplicity, had been tremendously graphic. Like a great actress she had managed to convey to her listeners the very emotional essence of her story.

Vance waited several moments before speaking.

"It was a frightful experience!" he murmured sympathetically. "I wish it wasn't necess'ry to worry you about details, but there are several points I'd like to go over with you."

She smiled faintly in appreciation of his considerateness, and waited.

"If you tried hard, do you think you could recall what wakened you?" he asked.

"No—there wasn't any sound that I can remember."

"Did you leave your door unlocked last night?"

"I think so. I don't generally lock it."

"And you heard no door open or close—anywhere?"

"No; none. Everything in the house was perfectly still."

"And yet you knew that some one was in the room. How was that?" Vance's voice, though gentle, was persistent.

"I—don't know . . . and yet there must have been something that told me."

"Exactly! Now try to think." Vance bent a little nearer to the troubled girl. "A soft breathing, perhaps—a slight gust of air as the person moved by your bed—a faint odor of perfume. . . ?"

She frowned painfully, as if trying to recall the elusive cause of her dread.

"I can't think—I can't remember." Her voice was scarcely audible. "I was so terribly frightened."

"If only we could trace the source!" Vance glanced at the doctor, who nodded understandingly, and said:

"Obviously some association whose stimulus went unrecognized."

"Did you feel, Miss Greene, that you knew the person who was here?" continued Vance. "That is to say, was it a familiar presence?"

"I don't know exactly. I only know I was afraid of it."

"But you heard it move toward you after you had risen and fled toward the window. Was there any familiarity in the sound?"

"No!" For the first time she spoke with em-

phasis. "It was just footsteps—soft, sliding footsteps."

"Of course, any one might have walked that way in the dark, or a person in bedroom slippers. . . ."

"It was only a few steps—and then came the awful noise and burning."

Vance waited a moment.

"Try very hard to recall those steps—or rather your impression of them. Would you say they were the steps of a man or a woman?"

An added pallor overspread the girl's face; and her frightened eyes ran over all the occupants of the room. Her breathing, I noticed, had quickened; and twice she parted her lips as if to speak, but checked herself each time. At last she said in a low tremulous voice:

"I don't know—I haven't the slightest idea."

A short, high-strung laugh, bitter and sneering, burst from Sibella; and all eyes were turned in amazed attention in her direction. She stood rigidly at the foot of the bed, her face flushed, her hands tightly clinched at her side.

"Why don't you tell them you recognized my footsteps?" she demanded of her sister in biting tones. "You had every intention of doing so. Haven't you got courage enough left to lie—you sobbing little cat?"

Ada caught her breath and seemed to draw herself nearer to the doctor, who gave Sibella a stern, admonitory look.

"Oh, I say, Sib! Hold your tongue." It was Chester who broke the startled silence that followed the outbreak.

Sibella shrugged her shoulders and walked to the window; and Vance again turned his attention to the girl on the bed, continuing his questioning as if nothing had happened.

"There's one more point, Miss Greene." His tone was even gentler than before. "When you groped your way across the room toward the switch, at what point did you come in contact with the unseen person?"

"About half-way to the door—just beyond that centre-table."

"You say a hand touched you. But how did it touch you? Did it shove you, or try to take hold of you?"

She shook her head vaguely.

"Not exactly. I don't know how to explain it, but I seemed to walk into the hand, as though it were outstretched—reaching for me."

"Would you say it was a large hand or a small one? Did you, for instance, get the impression of strength?"

There was another silence. Again the girl's respiration quickened, and she cast a frightened glance at Sibella, who stood staring out into the black, swinging branches of the trees in the side yard.

"I don't know—oh, I don't know!" Her words were like a stifled cry of anguish. "I didn't notice. It was all so sudden—so horrible."

"But try to think," urged Vance's low, insistent voice. "Surely you got some impression. Was it a man's hand, or a woman's?"

Sibella now came swiftly to the bed, her cheeks very pale, her eyes blazing. For a moment she

glared at the stricken girl; then she turned resolutely to Vance.

"You asked me down-stairs if I had any idea as to who might have done the shooting. I didn't answer you then, but I'll answer you now. I'll tell you who's guilty!" She jerked her head toward the bed, and pointed a quivering finger at the still figure lying there. "There's the guilty one—that snivelling little outsider, that sweet angelic little snake in the grass!"

So incredible, so unexpected, was this accusation that for a time no one in the room spoke. A groan burst from Ada's lips, and she clutched at the doctor's hand with a spasmodic movement of despair.

"Oh, Sibella—how could you!" she breathed.

Von Blon had stiffened, and an angry light came into his eyes. But before he could speak Sibella was rushing on with her illogical, astounding indictment.

"Oh, she's the one who did it! And she's deceiving you just as she's always tried to deceive the rest of us. She hates us—she's hated us ever since father brought her into this house. She resents us—the things we have, the very blood in our veins. Heaven knows what blood's in hers. She hates us because she isn't our equal. She'd gladly see us all murdered. She killed Julia first, because Julia ran the house and saw to it that she did something to earn her livelihood. She despises us; and she planned to get rid of us."

The girl on the bed looked piteously from one to the other of us. There was no resentment in her eyes; she appeared stunned and unbelieving, as if she doubted the reality of what she had heard.

"Most interestin'," drawled Vance. It was his ironic tone, more than the words themselves, that focussed all eyes on him. He had been watching Sibella during her tirade, and his gaze was still on her.

"You seriously accuse your sister of doing the shooting?" He spoke now in a pleasant, almost friendly, voice.

"I do!" she declared brazenly. "She hates us all."

"As far as that goes," smiled Vance, "I haven't noticed a superabundance of love and affection in any of the Greene family." His tone was without offense. "And do you base your accusation on anything specific, Miss Greene?"

"Isn't it specific enough that she wants us all out of the way, that she thinks she would have everything—ease, luxury, freedom—if there wasn't any one else to inherit the Greene money?"

"Hardly specific enough to warrant a direct accusation of so heinous a character.—And by the by, Miss Greene, just how would you explain the method of the crime if called as a witness in a court of law? You couldn't altogether ignore the fact that Miss Ada herself was shot in the back, don't y' know?"

For the first time the sheer impossibility of the accusation seemed to strike Sibella. She became sullen; and her mouth settled into a contour of angry bafflement.

"As I told you once before, I'm not a policewoman," she retorted. "Crime isn't *my* specialty."

"Nor logic either apparently." A whimsical note crept into Vance's voice. "But perhaps I misinterpret your accusation. Did you mean to imply that Miss Ada shot your sister Julia, and that some one

else—party or parties unknown, I believe the phrase is—shot Miss Ada immediately afterward—in a spirit of vengeance, perhaps? A crime *à quatre mains*, so to speak?"

Sibella's confusion was obvious, but her stubborn wrath had in no wise abated.

"Well, if that was the way it happened," she countered malevolently, "it's a rotten shame they didn't do the job better."

"The blunder may at least prove unfortunate for somebody," suggested Vance pointedly. "Still, I hardly think we can seriously entertain the double-culprit theory. Both of your sisters, d' ye see, were shot with the same gun—a .32 revolver—within a few minutes of each other. I'm afraid that we'll have to be content with one guilty person."

Sibella's manner suddenly became sly and calculating.

"What kind of a gun was yours, Chet?" she asked her brother.

"Oh, it was a .32, all right—an old Smith & Wesson revolver." Chester was painfully ill at ease.

"Was it, indeed? Well, that's that." She turned her back on us and went again to the window.

The tension in the room slackened, and Von Blon leaned solicitously over the wounded girl and rearranged the pillows.

"Every one's upset, Ada," he said soothingly. "You mustn't worry about what's happened. Sibella'll be sorry to-morrow and make amends. This affair has got on everybody's nerves."

The girl gave him a grateful glance, and seemed to relax under his ministrations.

After a moment he straightened up and looked at Markham.

"I hope you gentlemen are through—for to-day, at least."

Both Vance and Markham had risen, and Heath and I had followed suit; but at that moment Sibella strode toward us again.

"Wait!" she commanded imperiously. "I've just thought of something. Chet's revolver! I know where it went.—*She* took it." Again she pointed accusingly at Ada. "I saw her in Chet's room the other day, and I wondered then why she was snooping about there." She gave Vance a triumphant leer. "That's specific, isn't it?"

"What day was this, Miss Greene?" As before, his calmness seemed to counteract the effect of her venom.

"What day? I don't remember exactly. Last week some time."

"The day you were looking for your emerald pin, perhaps?"

Sibella hesitated; then said angrily: "I don't recall. Why should I remember the exact time? All I know is that, as I was passing down the hall, I glanced into Chet's room—the door was half open—and I saw *her* in there . . . by the desk."

"And was it so unusual to see Miss Ada in your brother's room?" Vance spoke without any particular interest.

"She never goes into any of our rooms," declared Sibella. "Except Rex's, sometimes. Julia told her long ago to keep out of them."

Ada gave her sister a look of infinite entreaty.

"Oh, Sibella," she moaned; "what have I ever done to make you dislike me so?"

"What have you done!" The other's voice was harsh and strident, and a look almost demoniacal smouldered in her levelled eyes. "Everything! Nothing! Oh, you're clever—with your quiet, sneaky ways, and your patient, hangdog look, and your goody-goody manner. But you don't pull the wool over *my* eyes. You've been hating all of us ever since you came here. And you've been waiting for the chance to kill us, planning and scheming—you vile little——"

"Sibella!" It was Von Blon's voice that, like the lash of a whip, cut in on this unreasoned tirade. "That will be enough!" He moved forward, and glanced menacingly into the girl's eyes. I was almost as astonished at his attitude as I had been at her wild words. There was a curious intimacy in his manner—an implication of familiarity which struck me as unusual even for a family physician of his long and friendly standing. Vance noticed it too, for his eyebrows went up slightly and he watched the scene with intense interest.

"You've become hysterical," Von Blon said, without lowering his minatory gaze. "You don't realize what you've been saying."

I felt he would have expressed himself far more forcibly if strangers had not been present. But his words had their effect. Sibella dropped her eyes, and a sudden change came over her. She covered her face with her hands, and her whole body shook with sobs.

"I'm—sorry. I was mad—and silly—to say such things."

"You'd better take Sibella to her room, Chester." Von Blon had resumed his professional tone. "This business has been too much for her."

The girl turned without another word and went out, followed by Chester.

"These modern women—all nerves," Von Blon commented laconically. Then he placed his hand on Ada's forehead. "Now, young lady, I'm going to give you something to make you sleep after all this excitement."

He had scarcely opened his medicine-case to prepare the draught when a shrill, complaining voice drifted clearly to us from the next room; and for the first time I noticed that the door of the little dressing-room which communicated with Mrs. Greene's quarters was slightly ajar.

"What's all the trouble now? Hasn't there been enough disturbance already without these noisy scenes in my very ear? But it doesn't matter, of course, how much *I* suffer. . . . Nurse! Shut those doors into Ada's room. You had no business to leave them open when you knew I was trying to get a little rest. You did it on purpose to annoy me. . . . And nurse! Tell the doctor I must see him before he goes. I have those stabbing pains in my spine again. But who thinks about me, lying here paralyzed——?"

The doors were closed softly, and the fretful voice was cut off from us.

"She could have had the doors closed a long time ago if she'd really wanted them closed," said Ada wearily, a look of distress on her drawn white face. "Why, Doctor Von, does she always pretend that every one deliberately makes her suffer?"

Von Blon sighed. "I've told you, Ada, that you mustn't take your mother's tantrums too seriously. Her irritability and complaining are part of her disease."

We bade the girl good-by, and the doctor walked with us into the hall.

"I'm afraid you didn't learn much," he remarked, almost apologetically. "It's most unfortunate Ada didn't get a look at her assailant." He addressed himself to Heath. "Did you, by the way, look in the dining-room wall-safe to make sure nothing was missing? You know, there's one there behind the big niello over the mantel."

"One of the first places we inspected." The Sergeant's voice was a bit disdainful. "And that reminds me, doc: I want to send a man up in the morning to look for finger-prints in Miss Ada's room."

Von Blon agreed amiably, and held out his hand to Markham.

"And if there's any way I can be of service to you or the police," he added pleasantly, "please call on me. I'll be only too glad to help. I don't see just what I can do, but one never knows."

Markham thanked him, and we descended to the lower hall. Sproot was waiting to help us with our coats, and a moment later we were in the District Attorney's car ploughing our way through the snowdrifts.

CHAPTER VII

VANCE ARGUES THE CASE

(Tuesday, November 9; 5 p. m.)

It was nearly five o'clock when we reached the Criminal Courts Building. Swacker had lit the old bronze-and-china chandelier of Markham's private office, and an atmosphere of eerie gloom pervaded the room.

"Not a nice family, Markham old dear," sighed Vance, lying back in one of the deep leather-upholstered chairs. "Decidedly not a nice family. A family run to seed, its old vigor vitiated. If the heredit'ry sires of the contempor'ry Greenes could rise from their sepulchres and look in upon their present progeny, my word! what a jolly good shock they'd have! . . . Funny thing how these old families degenerate under the environment of ease and idleness. There are the Wittelsbachs, and the Romanoffs, and the Julian-Claudian house, and the Abbassid dynasty—all examples of phyletic disintegration. . . . And it's the same with nations, don't y' know. Luxury and unrestrained indulgence are corruptin' influences. Look at Rome under the soldier emperors, and Assyria under Sardanapalus, and Egypt under the later Ramessids, and the Vandal African empire under Gelimer. It's very distressin'."

"Your erudite observations might be highly absorbing to the social historian," grumbled Markham,

with an undisguised show of irritability; "but I can't say they're particularly edifying, or even relevant, in the present circumstances."

"I wouldn't be too positive on that point," Vance returned easily. "In fact, I submit, for your earnest and profound consideration, the temperaments and internal relationships of the Greene clan, as pointers upon the dark road of the present investigation. . . . Really, y' know"—he assumed a humorsome tone—"it's most unfortunate that you and the Sergeant are so obsessed with the idea of social justice and that sort of thing; for society would be much better off if such families as the Greenes were exterminated. Still, it's a fascinatin' problem—most fascinatin'."

"I regret I can't share your enthusiasm for it." Markham spoke with asperity. "The crime strikes me as sordid and commonplace. And if it hadn't been for your interference I'd have sent Chester Greene on his way this morning with some tactful platitudes. But you had to intercede, with your cryptic innuendoes and mysterious head-waggings; and I foolishly let myself be drawn into it. Well, I trust you had an enjoyable afternoon. As for myself, I have three hours' accumulated work before me."

His complaint was an obvious suggestion that we take ourselves off; but Vance showed no intention of going.

"Oh, I sha'n't depart just yet," he announced with a bantering smile. "I couldn't bring myself to leave you in your present state of grievous error. You need guidance, Markham; and I've quite made

up my mind to pour out my flutterin' heart to you and the Sergeant."

Markham frowned. He understood Vance so well that he knew the other's levity was only superficial—that, indeed, it cloaked some particularly serious purpose. And the experience of a long, intimate friendship had taught him that Vance's actions —however unreasonable they might appear—were never the result of an idle whim.

"Very well," he acquiesced. "But I'd be grateful for an economy of words."

Vance sighed mournfully.

"Your attitude is so typical of the spirit of breathless speed existing in this restless day." He fixed an inquisitive gaze on Heath. "Tell me, Sergeant: you saw the body of Julia Greene, didn't you?"

"Sure, I saw it."

"Was her position in the bed a natural one?"

"How do I know how she generally laid in bed?" Heath was restive and in bad humor. "She was half sitting up, with a coupla pillows under her shoulders, and the covers pulled up."

"Nothing unusual about her attitude?"

"Not that I could see. There hadn't been a struggle, if that's what you mean."

"And her hands: were they outside or under the covers?"

Heath looked up, mildly astonished.

"They were outside. And, now that you mention it, they had a tight hold on the spread."

"Clutching it, in fact?"

"Well, yes."

Vance leaned forward quickly.

"And her face, Sergeant? Had she been shot in her sleep?"

"It didn't look that way. Her eyes were wide open, staring straight ahead."

"Her eyes were open and staring," repeated Vance, a note of eagerness coming into his voice. "What would you say her expression indicated? Fear? Horror? Surprise?"

Heath regarded Vance shrewdly. "Well, it mighta been any one of 'em. Her mouth was open, like as if she was surprised at something."

"And she was clutching the spread with both hands." Vance's look drifted into space. Then slowly he rose and walked the length of the office and back, his head down. He halted in front of the District Attorney's desk, and leaned over, resting both hands on the back of a chair.

"Listen, Markham. There's something terrible and unthinkable going on in that house. No haphazard unknown assassin came in by the front door last night and shot down those two women. The crime was planned—thought out. Some one lay in wait—some one who knew his way about, knew where the light-switches were, knew when every one was asleep, knew when the servants had retired—knew just when and how to strike the blow. Some deep, awful motive lies behind that crime. There are depths beneath depths in what happened last night—obscure fetid chambers of the human soul. Black hatreds, unnatural desires, hideous impulses, obscene ambitions are at the bottom of it; and you are only playing into the murderer's hands when you sit back and refuse to see its significance."

His voice had a curious hushed quality, and it was difficult to believe that this was the habitually debonair and cynical Vance.

"That house is polluted, Markham. It's crumbling in decay—not material decay, perhaps, but a putrefaction far more terrible. The very heart and essence of that old house is rotting away. And all the inmates are rotting with it, disintegrating in spirit and mind and character. They've been polluted by the very atmosphere they've created. This crime, which you take so lightly, was inevitable in such a setting. I only wonder it was not more terrible, more vile. It marked one of the tertiary stages of the general dissolution of that abnormal establishment."

He paused, and extended his hand in a hopeless gesture.

"Think of the situation. That old, lonely, spacious house, exuding the musty atmosphere of dead generations, faded inside and out, run down, dingy, filled with ghosts of another day, standing there in its ill-kept grounds, lapped by the dirty waters of the river. . . . And then think of those six ill-sorted, restless, unhealthy beings compelled to live there in daily contact for a quarter of a century—such was old Tobias Greene's perverted idealism. And they've lived there, day in and day out, in that mouldly miasma of antiquity—unfit to meet the conditions of any alternative, too weak or too cowardly to strike out alone; held by an undermining security and a corrupting ease; growing to hate the very sight of one another, becoming bitter, spiteful, jealous, vicious; wearing down each other's nerves to the

raw; consumed with resentment, aflame with hate, thinking evil—complaining, fighting, snarling. . . . Then, at last, the breaking-point—the logical, ineluctable figuration of all this self-feeding, ingrowing hatred."

"All of that is easy to understand," agreed Markham. "But, after all, your conclusion is wholly theoretic, not to say literary.—By what tangible links do you connect last night's shooting with the admittedly abnormal situation at the Greene mansion?"

"There are no tangible links—that's the horror of it. But the joinders are there, however shadowy. I began to sense them the minute I entered the house; and all this afternoon I was reaching for them blindly. But they eluded me at every turn. It was like a house of mazes and false passages and trapdoors and reeking oubliettes: nothing normal, nothing sane—a house in a nightmare, peopled by strange, abnormal creatures, each reflecting the subtle, monstrous horror that broke forth last night and went prowling about the old hallways. Didn't you sense it? Didn't you see the vague shape of this abomination continually flash out and disappear as we talked to these people and watched them battling against their own hideous thoughts and suspicions?"

Markham moved uneasily and straightened a pile of papers before him. Vance's unwonted gravity had affected him.

"I understand perfectly what you mean," he said. "But I don't see that your impressions bring us any nearer to a new theory of the crime. The Greene mansion is unhealthy—that's granted—and so, no

doubt, are the people in it. But I'm afraid you've been oversusceptible to its atmosphere. You talk as if last night's crime were comparable to the poisoning orgies of the Borgias, or the Marquise de Brinvilliers affair, or the murder of Drusus and Germanicus, or the suffocation of the York princes in the Tower. I'll admit the setting is consonant with that sort of stealthy, romantic crime; but, after all, housebreakers and bandits are shooting people senselessly every week throughout the country, in very much the same way the two Greene women were shot."

"You're shutting your eyes to the facts, Markham," Vance declared earnestly. "You're overlooking several strange features of last night's crime—the horrified, astounded attitude of Julia at the moment of death; the illogical interval between the two shots; the fact that the lights were on in both rooms; Ada's story of that hand reaching for her; the absence of any signs of a forced entry——"

"What about those footprints in the snow?" interrupted Heath's matter-of-fact voice.

"What about them, indeed?" Vance wheeled about. "They're as incomprehensible as the rest of this hideous business. Some one walked to and from the house within a half-hour of the crime; but it was some one who knew he could get in quietly and without disturbing any one."

"There's nothing mysterious about that," asserted the practical Sergeant. "There are four servants in the house, and any one of 'em could've been in on the job."

Vance smiled ironically.

"And this accomplice in the house, who so generously opened the front door at a specified hour, failed to inform the intruder where the loot was, and omitted to acquaint him with the arrangement of the house; with the result that, once he was inside, he went astray, overlooked the dining-room, wandered up-stairs, went groping about the hall, got lost in the various bedrooms, had a seizure of panic, shot two women, turned on the lights by switches hidden behind the furniture, made his way down-stairs without a sound when Sproot was within a few feet of him, and walked out the front door to freedom! . . . A strange burglar, Sergeant. And an even stranger inside accomplice.—No; your explanation won't do —decidedly it won't do." He turned back to Markham. "And the only way you'll ever find the true explanation for those shootings is by understanding the unnatural situation that exists in the house itself."

"But we know the situation, Vance," Markham argued patiently. "I'll admit it's an unusual one. But it's not necessarily criminal. Antagonistic human elements are often thrown together; and a mutual hate is generated as a result. But mere hate is rarely a motive for murder; and it certainly does not constitute evidence of criminal activity."

"Perhaps not. But hatred and enforced propinquity may breed all manner of abnormalities—outrageous passions, abominable evils, devilish intrigues. And in the present case there are any number of curious and sinister facts that need explaining——"

"Ah! Now you're becoming more tangible. Just what are these facts that call for explanation?"

Vance lit a cigarette and sat down on the edge of the table.

"For instance, why did Chester Greene come here in the first place and solicit your help? Because of the disappearance of the gun? Maybe; but I doubt if it is the whole explanation. And what about the gun itself? Did it disappear? Or did Chester secrete it? Deuced queer about that gun. And Sibella said she saw it last week. But did she see it? We'll know a lot more about the case when we can trace the peregrinations of that revolver.—And why did Chester hear the first shot so readily, when Rex, in the next room to Ada's, says he failed to hear the second shot?—And that long interval between the two reports will need some explaining.—And there's Sproot—the multilingual butler who happened to be reading Martial—Martial, by all that's holy!—when the grim business took place, and came directly to the scene without meeting or hearing any one.—And just what significance attaches to the pious Hemming's oracular pronouncements about the Lord of hosts smiting the Greenes as he did the children of Babylon? She has some obscure religious notion in her head—which, after all, may not be so obscure.—And the German cook: there's a woman with, as we euphemistically say, a past. Despite her phlegmatic appearance, she's not of the servant class; yet she's been feeding the Greenes dutifully for over a dozen years. You recall her explanation of how she came to the Greenes? Her husband was a friend of old Tobias's; and Tobias gave orders she was to remain as cook as long as she desired. She needs explaining, Markham—and a

dashed lot of it.—And Rex, with his projecting parietals and his wambly body and his periodic fits. Why did he get so excited when we questioned him? He certainly didn't act like an innocent and uncomprehending spectator of an attempted burglary.—And again I mention the lights. Who turned them on, and why? And in both rooms! In Julia's room *before* the shot was fired, for she evidently saw the assassin and understood his purpose; and in Ada's room, *after* the shooting! Those are facts which fairly shriek for explanation; for without an explanation they're mad, irrational, utterly incredible.—And why wasn't Von Blon at home in the middle of the night when Sproot phoned him? And how did it happen he nevertheless arrived so promptly? Coincidence? . . . And, by the by, Sergeant: was that double set of footprints like the single spoor of the doctor's?"

"There wasn't any way of telling. The snow was too flaky."

"It probably doesn't matter particularly, anyhow." Vance again faced Markham and resumed his recapitulation. "And then there are the points of difference in these two attacks. Julia was shot from the front when she was in bed, whereas Ada was shot in the back after she had risen from bed, although the murderer had ample time to go to her and take aim while she was still lying down. Why did he wait silently until the girl got up and approached him? How did he dare wait at all after he had killed Julia and alarmed the house? Does that strike you as panic? Or as cool-headedness? —And how did Julia's door come to be unlocked at

that particular time? That's something I especially want clarified.—And perhaps you noticed, Markham, that Chester himself went to summon Sibella to the interview in the drawing-room, and that he remained with her a considerable time. Why, now, did he send Sproot for Rex, and fetch Sibella personally? And why the delay? I yearn for an explanation of what passed between them before they eventually appeared.—And why was Sibella so definite that there wasn't a burglar, and yet so evasive when we asked her to suggest a counter-theory? What underlay her satirical frankness when she held up each member of the Greene household, including herself, as a possible suspect?—And then there are the details of Ada's story. Some of them are amazing, incomprehensible, almost fabulous. There was no apparent sound in the room; yet she was conscious of a menacing presence. And that outstretched hand and the shuffling footsteps—we simply must have an explanation of those things. And her hesitancy about saying whether she thought it was a man or a woman; and Sibella's evident belief that the girl thought it was she. That wants explaining, Markham.—And Sibella's hysterical accusation against Ada. What lay behind that?—And don't forget that curious scene between Sibella and Von Blon when he reproached her for her outburst. That was devilish odd. There's some intimacy there —*ça saute aux yeux.* You noticed how she obeyed him. And you doubtless observed, too, that Ada is rather fond of the doctor: snuggled up to him figuratively during the performance, opened her eyes on him wistfully, looked to him for protection. Oh,

our little Ada has flutterings in his direction. And yet he adopts the hovering professional-bedside manner of a high-priced medico toward her, whereas he treats Sibella very much as Chester might if he had the courage."

Vance inhaled deeply on his cigarette.

"Yes, Markham, there are many things that must be satisfactorily accounted for before I can believe in your hypothetical burglar."

Markham sat for a while, engrossed in his thoughts.

"I've listened to your Homeric catalogue, Vance," he said at length, "but I can't say that it inflames me. You've suggested a number of interesting possibilities, and raised several points that might bear looking into. However, the only potential weight of your argument lies in an accumulation of items which, taken separately, are not particularly impressive. A plausible answer might be found for each one of them. The trouble is, the integers of your summary are without a connecting thread, and consequently must be regarded as separate units."

"That legal mind of yours!" Vance rose and paced up and down. "An accumulation of queer and unexplained facts centring about a crime is no more impressive than each separate item in the total! Well, well! I give up. I renounce all reason. I fold up my tent like the Arabs and as silently steal away." He took up his coat. "I leave you to your fantastic, delirious burglar, who walks without keys into a house and steals nothing, who knows where electric switches are hidden but can't find a staircase, who shoots women and then turns up the lights.

When you find him, my dear Lycurgus, you should, in all humaneness, send him to the psychopathic ward. He's quite unaccountable, I assure you."

Markham, despite his opposition, had not been unimpressed. Vance unquestionably had undermined to some extent his belief in a housebreaker. But I could readily understand why he was reluctant to abandon this theory until it had been thoroughly tested. His next words, in fact, explained his attitude.

"I'm not denying the remote possibility that this affair may go deeper than appears. But there's too little to go on at present to warrant an investigation along other than routine lines. We can't very well stir up an ungodly scandal by raking the members of a prominent family over the coals, when there's not a scintilla of evidence against any one of them. It's too unjust and dangerous a proceeding. We must at least wait until the police have finished their investigation. Then, if nothing develops, we can again take inventory and decide how to proceed. . . . How long, Sergeant, do you figure on being busy?"

Heath took his cigar from his mouth and regarded it thoughtfully.

"That's hard to say, sir. Dubois'll finish up his finger-printing to-morrow, and we're checking up on the regulars as fast as we can. Also, I've got two men digging up the records of the Greene servants. It may take a lot of time, and it may go quick. Depends on the breaks we get."

Vance sighed.

"And it was such a neat, fascinatin' crime! I've

rather been looking forward to it, don't y' know, and now you talk of prying into the early amours of serving-maids and that sort of thing. It's most disheartenin'."

He buttoned his ulster about him and walked to the door.

"Ah, well, there's nothing for me to do while you Jasons are launched on your quaint quest. I think I'll retire and resume my translation of Delacroix's 'Journal.'"

But Vance was not destined then to finish this task he had had in mind so long. Three days later the front pages of the country's press carried glaring head-lines telling of a second grim and unaccountable tragedy at the old Greene mansion, which altered the entire character of the case and immediately lifted it into the realm of the foremost *causes célèbres* of modern times. After this second blow had fallen all ideas of a casual burglar were banished. There could no longer be any doubt that a hidden death-dealing horror stalked through the dim corridors of that fated house.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND TRAGEDY

(Friday, November 12; 8 a. m.)

The day after we had taken leave of Markham at his office the rigor of the weather suddenly relaxed. The sun came out, and the thermometer rose nearly thirty degrees. Toward night of the second day, however, a fine, damp snow began to fall, spreading a thin white blanket over the city; but around eleven the skies were again clear.

I mention these facts because they had a curious bearing on the second crime at the Greene mansion. Footprints again appeared on the front walk; and, as a result of the clinging softness of the snow, the police also found tracks in the lower hall and on the marble stairs.

Vance had spent Wednesday and Thursday in his library reading desultorily and checking Vollard's catalogue of Cézanne's water-colors. The three-volume edition of the "Journal de Eugène Delacroix"* lay on his writing-table; but I noticed that he did not so much as open it. He was restless and distracted, and his long silences at dinner (which we ate together in the living-room before the great log fire) told me only too clearly that something was perturbing him. Moreover, he had sent notes cancelling several social engagements, and had given orders to

* E. Plon, Nourrit et Cie., Paris, 1893.

Currie, his valet and domestic factotum, that he was "out" to callers.

As he sat sipping his cognac at the end of dinner on Thursday night, his eyes idly tracing the forms in the Renoir *Beigneuse* above the mantel, he gave voice to his thoughts.

"'Pon my word, Van, I can't shake the atmosphere of that damnable house. Markham is probably right in refusing to take the matter seriously—one can't very well chivy a bereaved family simply because I'm oversensitive. And yet"—he shook himself slightly—"it's most annoyin'. Maybe I'm becoming weak and emotional. What if I should suddenly go in for Whistlers and Böcklins! Could you endure it? *Miserere nostri!* . . . No, it won't come to that. But—dash it all!—that Greene murder is haunting my slumbers like a lamia. And the business isn't over yet. There's a horrible incompleteness about what's already occurred. . . ."

It was scarcely eight o'clock on the following morning when Markham brought us the news of the second Greene tragedy. I had risen early, and was having my coffee in the library when Markham came in, brushing past the astonished Currie with only a curt nod.

"Get Vance out right away—will you, Van Dine?" he began, without even a word of greeting. "Something serious has happened."

I hastened to fetch Vance, who grumblingly slipped into a camel's-hair dressing-gown and came leisurely into the library.

"My dear Markham!" he reproached the District Attorney. "Why pay your social calls in the middle of the night?"

"This isn't a social call," Markham told him tartly. "Chester Greene has been murdered."

"Ah!" Vance rang for Currie, and lighted a cigarette. "Coffee for two and clothes for one," he ordered, when the man appeared. Then he sank into a chair before the fire and gave Markham a waggish look. "That same unique burglar, I suppose. A perseverin' lad. Did the family plate disappear this time?"

Markham gave a mirthless laugh.

"No, the plate's intact; and I think we can now eliminate the burglar theory. I'm afraid your premonitions were correct—damn your uncanny faculty!"

"Pour out your heart-breakin' story." Vance, for all his levity, was extraordinarily interested. His moodiness of the past two days had given way to an almost eager alertness.

"It was Sproot who phoned the news to Headquarters a little before midnight. The operator in the Homicide Bureau caught Heath at home, and the Sergeant was at the Greene house inside of half an hour. He's there now—phoned me at seven this morning. I told him I'd hurry out, so I didn't get many details over the wire. All I know is that Chester Greene was fatally shot last night at almost the exact hour that the former shootings occurred—a little after half past eleven."

"Was he in his own room at the time?" Vance was pouring the coffee which Currie had brought in.

"I believe Heath did mention he was found in his bedroom."

"Shot from the front?"

"Yes, through the heart, at very close range."

"Very interestin'. A duplication of Julia's death, as it were." Vance became reflective. "So the old house has claimed another victim. But why Chester? . . . Who found him, incidentally?"

"Sibella, I think Heath said. Her room, you remember, is next to Chester's, and the shot probably roused her. But we'd better be going."

"Am I invited?"

"I wish you would come." Markham made no effort to hide his desire to have the other accompany him.

"Oh, I had every intention of doing so, don't y' know." And Vance left the room abruptly to get dressed.

It took the District Attorney's car but a few minutes to reach the Greene mansion from Vance's house in East 38th Street. A patrolman stood guard outside the great iron gates, and a plain-clothes man lounged on the front steps beneath the arched doorway.

Heath was in the drawing-room talking earnestly to Inspector Moran, who had just arrived; and two men from the Homicide Bureau stood by the window awaiting orders. The house was peculiarly silent: no member of the family was to be seen.

The Sergeant came forward at once. His usual ruddiness of complexion was gone and his eyes were troubled. He shook hands with Markham, and then gave Vance a look of friendly welcome.

"You had the right dope, Mr. Vance. Somebody's ripping things wide open here; and it isn't swag they're after."

Inspector Moran joined us, and again the handshaking ceremony took place.

"This case is going to stir things up considerably," he said. "And we're in for an unholy scandal if we don't clean it up quickly."

The worried look in Markham's eyes deepened.

"The sooner we get to work, then, the better. Are you going to lend a hand, Inspector?"

"There's no need, I think," Moran answered quietly. I'll leave the police end entirely with Sergeant Heath; and now that you—and Mr. Vance—are here, I'd be of no use." He gave Vance a pleasant smile, and made his adieus. "Keep in touch with me, Sergeant, and use all the men you want."*

When he had gone Heath gave us the details of the crime.

At about half past eleven, after the family and the servants had retired, the shot was fired. Sibella was reading in bed at the time and heard it distinctly. She rose immediately and, after listening for several moments, stole up the servants' stairs—the entrance to which was but a few feet from her door. She wakened the butler, and the two of them then went to Chester's room. The door was unlocked, and the lights in the room were burning. Chester Greene was sitting, slightly huddled, in a chair near the desk. Sproot went to him, but saw that he was dead, and immediately left the room, locking the door. He

* Inspector William M. Moran, who died last summer, had been the commanding officer of the Detective Bureau for eight years. He was a man of rare and unusual qualities, and with his death the New York Police Department lost one of its most efficient and trustworthy officials. He had formerly been a well-known up-State banker who had been forced to close his doors during the 1907 panic.

then telephoned to the police and to Doctor Von Blon.

"I got here before Von Blon did," Heath explained. "The doctor was out again when the butler phoned, and didn't get the message till nearly one o'clock. I was damn glad of it, because it gave me a chance to check up on the footprints outside. The minute I turned in at the gate I could see that somebody had come and gone, the same as last time; and I whistled for the man on the beat to guard the entrance until Snitkin arrived. Then I came on in, keeping along the edge of the walk; and the first thing I noticed when the butler opened the door was a little puddle of water on the rug in the hall. Somebody had recently tracked the soft snow in. I found a coupla other puddles in the hall, and there were some wet imprints on the steps leading up-stairs. Five minutes later Snitkin gave me the signal from the street, and I put him to work on the footprints outside. The tracks were plain, and Snitkin was able to get some pretty accurate measurements."

After Snitkin had been put to work on the footprints, the Sergeant, it seemed, went up-stairs to Chester's room and made an examination. But he found nothing unusual, aside from the murdered man in the chair, and after half an hour descended again to the dining-room, where Sibella and Sproot were waiting. He had just begun his questioning of them when Doctor Von Blon arrived.

"I took him up-stairs," said Heath, "and he looked at the body. He seemed to want to stick around, but I told him he'd be in the way. So he

talked to Miss Greene out in the hall for five or ten minutes, and then left."

Shortly after Doctor Von Blon's departure two other men from the Homicide Bureau arrived, and the next two hours were spent in interrogating the members of the household. But nobody, except Sibella, admitted even hearing the shot. Mrs. Greene was not questioned. When Miss Craven, the nurse, who slept on the third floor, was sent in to her, she reported that the old lady was sleeping soundly; and the Sergeant decided not to disturb her. Nor was Ada awakened: according to the nurse, the girl had been asleep since nine o'clock.

Rex Greene, however, when interviewed, contributed one vague and, as it seemed, contradictory bit of evidence. He had been lying awake, he said, at the time the snowfall ceased, which was a little after eleven. Then, about ten minutes later, he had imagined he heard a faint shuffling noise in the hall and the sound of a door closing softly. He had thought nothing of it, and only recalled it when pressed by Heath. A quarter of an hour afterward he had looked at his watch. It was then twenty-five minutes past eleven; and very soon after that he had fallen asleep.

"The only queer thing about his story," commented Heath, "is the time. If he's telling the tale straight, he heard this noise and the door shutting twenty minutes or so before the shot was fired. And nobody in the house was up at that time. I tried to shake him on the question of the exact hour, but he stuck to it like a leech. I compared his watch with mine, and it was O. K. Anyhow, there's nothing

much to the story. The wind mighta blown a door shut, or he mighta heard a noise out in the street and thought it was in the hall."

"Nevertheless, Sergeant," put in Vance, "if I were you I'd file Rex's story away for future meditation. Somehow it appeals to me."

Heath looked up sharply and was about to ask a question; but he changed his mind and said merely: "It's filed." Then he finished his report to Markham.

After interrogating the occupants of the house he had gone back to the Bureau, leaving his men on guard, and set the machinery of his office in operation. He had returned to the Greene mansion early that morning, and was now waiting for the Medical Examiner, the finger-print experts, and the official photographer. He had given orders for the servants to remain in their quarters, and had instructed Sproot to serve breakfast to all the members of the family in their own rooms.

"This thing's going to take work, sir," he concluded. "And it's going to be touchy going, too."

Markham nodded gravely, and glanced toward Vance, whose eyes were resting moodily on an old oil-painting of Tobias Greene.

"Does this new development help co-ordinate any of your former impressions?" he asked.

"It at least substantiates the feeling I had that this old house reeks with a deadly poison," Vance replied. "This thing is like a witches' sabbath." He gave Markham a humorous smile. "I'm beginning to think your task is going to take on the nature of exorcising devils."

Markham grunted.

"I'll leave the magic potions to you. . . . Sergeant, suppose we take a look at the body before the Medical Examiner gets here."

Heath led the way without a word. When we reached the head of the stairs he took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door of Chester's room. The electric lights were still burning—sickly yellow disks in the gray daylight which filtered in from the windows above the river.

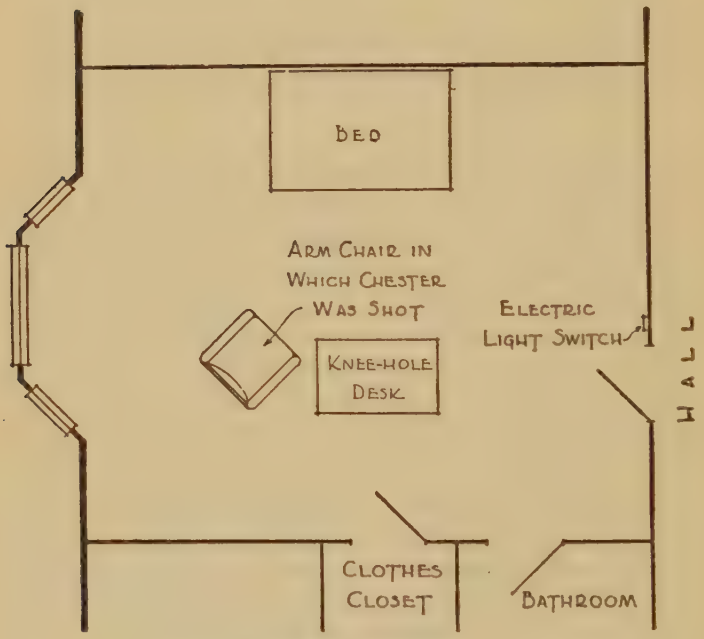
The room, long and narrow, contained an anachronistic assortment of furniture. It was a typical man's apartment, with an air of comfortable untidiness. Newspapers and sports magazines cluttered the table and desk; ash-trays were everywhere; an open cellaret stood in one corner; and a collection of golf-clubs lay on the tapestried Chesterfield. The bed, I noticed, had not been slept in.

In the centre of the room, beneath an old-fashioned cut-glass chandelier, was a Chippendale "kneehole" desk, beside which stood a sleepy-hollow chair. It was in this chair that the body of Chester Greene, clad in dressing-gown and slippers, reclined. He was slumped a little forward, the head turned slightly back and resting against the tufted upholstery. The light from the chandelier cast a spectral illumination on his face; and the sight of it laid a spell of horror on me. The eyes, normally prominent, now seemed to be protruding from their sockets in a stare of unutterable amazement; and the sagging chin and flabby parted lips intensified this look of terrified wonder.

Vance was studying the dead man's features intently.

"Would you say, Sergeant," he asked, without looking up, "that Chester and Julia saw the same thing as they passed from this world?"

Heath coughed uneasily.



CHESTER'S BEDROOM.

"Well," he admitted, "something surprised them, and that's a fact."

"Surprised them! Sergeant, you should thank your Maker that you are not cursed with an imagination. The whole truth of this fiendish business lies in those bulbous eyes and that gaping mouth. Unlike Ada, both Julia and Chester saw the thing

that menaced them; and it left them stunned and aghast."

"Well, we can't get any information outa *them*." Heath's practicality as usual was uppermost.

"Not oral information, certainly. But, as Hamlet put it, murder, though it have no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organ."

"Come, come, Vance. Be tangible." Markham spoke with acerbity. "What's in your mind?"

"'Pon my word, I don't know. It's too vague." He leaned over and picked up a small book from the floor just beneath where the dead man's hand hung over the arm of the chair. "Chester apparently was immersed in literature at the time of his taking off." He opened the book casually. "'Hydrotherapy and Constipation.' Yes, Chester was just the kind to worry about his colon. Some one probably told him that intestinal stasis interfered with the proper stance. He's no doubt clearing the asphodel from the Elysian fields at the present moment preparat'ry to laying out a golf-course."

He became suddenly serious.

"You see what this book means, Markham? Chester was sitting here reading when the murderer came in. Yet he did not so much as rise or call out. Furthermore, he let the intruder stand directly in front of him. He did not even lay down his book, but sat back in his chair relaxed. Why? Because the murderer was some one Chester knew—and trusted! And when the gun was suddenly brought forth and pointed at his heart, he was too astounded to move. And in that second of bewilderment and unbelief the trigger was pulled and the bullet entered his heart."

Markham nodded slowly, in deep perplexity, and

Heath studied the attitude of the dead man more closely.

"That's a good theory," the Sergeant conceded finally. "Yes, he musta let the bird get right on top of him without suspecting anything. Same like Julia did."

"Exactly, Sergeant. The two murders constitute a most suggestive parallel."

"Still and all, there's one point you're overlooking." Heath's brow was roughened in a troubled frown. "Chester's door mighta been unlocked last night, seeing as he hadn't gone to bed, and so this person coulda walked in without any trouble. But Julia, now, was already undressed and in bed; and she always locked her door at night. Now, how would you say this person with the gun got into Julia's room, Mr. Vance?"

"There's no difficulty about that. Let us say, as a tentative hypothesis, that Julia had disrobed, switched off the lights, and climbed into her queenly bed. Then came a tap on the door—perhaps a tap she recognized. She rose, put on the lights, opened the door, and again repaired to her bed for warmth while she held parley with her visitor. Maybe—who knows?—the visitor sat on the edge of the bed during the call. Then suddenly the visitor produced the revolver and fired, and made a hurried exit, forgetting to switch the lights off. Such a theory—though I don't insist on the details—would square neatly with my idea regarding Chester's caller."

"It may've been like you say," admitted Heath dubiously. "But why all the hocus-pocus when it came to shooting Ada? That job was done in the dark."

"The rationalistic philosophers tell us, Sergeant" —Vance became puckishly pedantic—"that there's a reason for everything, but that the finite mind is woefully restricted. The altered technic of our elusive culprit when dealing with Ada is one of the things that is obscure. But you've touched a vital point. If we could discover the reason for this reversal of our *inconnu's* homicidal tactics, I believe we'd be a lot forrader in our investigation."

Heath made no reply. He stood in the centre of the room running his eye over the various objects and pieces of furniture. Presently he stepped to the clothes-closet, pulled open the door, and turned on a pendant electric light just inside. As he stood gloomily peering at the closet's contents there was a sound of heavy footsteps in the hall and Snitkin appeared in the open door. Heath turned and, without giving his assistant time to speak, asked gruffly:

"How did you make out with those footprints?"

"Got all the dope here." Snitkin crossed to the Sergeant, and held out a long Manila envelope. "There wasn't no trouble in checking the measurements and cutting the patterns. But they're not going to be a hell of a lot of good, I'm thinking. There's ten million guys more or less in this country who coulda made 'em."

Heath had opened the envelope and drawn forth a thin white cardboard pattern which looked like an inner sole of a shoe.

"It wasn't no pigmy who made this print," he remarked.

"That's the catch in it," explained Snitkin "The size don't mean nothing much, for it ain't a shoe-

track. Those footprints were made by galoshes, and there's no telling how much bigger they were than the guy's foot. They mighta been worn over a shoe anywheres from a size eight to a size ten, and with a width anywheres from an A to a D."

Heath nodded with obvious disappointment.

"You're sure about 'em being galoshes?" He was reluctant to let what promised to be a valuable clew slip away.

"You can't get around it. The rubber tread was distinct in several places, and the shallow, scooped heel stood out plain as day. Anyhow, I got Jerym* to check up on my findings."

Snitkin's gaze wandered idly to the floor of the clothes-closet.

"Those are the kind of things that made the tracks." He pointed to a pair of high arctics which had been thrown carelessly under a boot-shelf. Then he leaned over and picked up one of them. As his eye rested on it he gave a grunt. "This looks like the size, too." He took the pattern from the Sergeant's hand and laid it on the sole of the overshoe. It fitted as perfectly as if the two had been cut simultaneously.

Heath was startled out of his depression.

"Now, what in hell does that mean!"

Markham had drawn near.

* Captain Anthony P. Jerym was one of the shrewdest and most painstaking criminologists of the New York Police Department. Though he had begun his career as an expert in the Bertillon system of measurements, he had later specialized in footprints—a subject which he had helped to elevate to an elaborate and complicated science. He had spent several years in Vienna studying Austrian methods, and had developed a means of scientific photography for footprints which gave him rank with such men as Londe, Burais, and Reiss.

"It might indicate, of course, that Chester went out somewhere last night late."

"But that don't make sense, sir," objected Heath. "If he'd wanted anything at that hour of the night he'd have sent the butler. And, anyway, the shops in this neighborhood were all closed by that time, for the tracks weren't made till after it had stopped snowing at eleven."

"And," supplemented Snitkin, "you can't tell by the tracks whether the guy that made 'em left the house and came back, or came to the house and went away, for there wasn't a single print on top of the other."

Vance was standing at the window looking out.

"That, now, is a most interestin' point, Sergeant," he commented. "I'd file it away along with Rex's story for prayerful consideration." He sauntered back to the desk and looked at the dead man thoughtfully. "No, Sergeant," he continued; "I can't picture Chester donning gum-shoes and sneaking out into the night on a mysterious errand. I'm afraid we'll have to find another explanation for those footprints."

"It's damn funny, just the same, that they should be the exact size of these galoshes."

"If," submitted Markham, "the footprints were not Chester's, then we're driven to the assumption that the murderer made them."

Vance slowly took out his cigarette-case.

"Yes," he agreed, "I think we may safely assume that."

CHAPTER IX

THE THREE BULLETS

(Friday, November 12; 9 a. m.)

At this moment Doctor Doremus, the Medical Examiner, a brisk, nervous man with a jaunty air, was ushered in by one of the detectives I had seen in the drawing-room. He blinked at the company, threw his hat and coat on a chair, and shook hands with every one.

"What are your friends trying to do, Sergeant?" he asked, eying the inert body in the chair. "Wipe out the whole family?" Without waiting for an answer to his grim pleasantry he went to the windows and threw up the shades with a clatter. "You gentlemen all through viewing the remains? If so, I'll get to work."

"Go to it," said Heath. Chester Greene's body was lifted to the bed and straightened out. "And how about the bullet, doc? Any chance of getting it before the autopsy?"

"How'm I going to get it without a probe and forceps? I ask you!" Doctor Doremus drew back the matted dressing-gown and inspected the wound. "But I'll see what I can do." Then he straightened up and cocked his eye facetiously at the Sergeant. "Well, I'm waiting for your usual query about the time of death."

"We know it."

"Hah! Wish you always did. This fixing the exact time by looking over a body is all poppycock anyway. The best we fellows can do is to approximate it. *Rigor mortis* works differently in different people. Don't ever take me too seriously, Sergeant, when I set an exact hour for you.—However, let's see. . . ."

He ran his hands over the body on the bed, unflexed the fingers, moved the head, and put his eye close to the coagulated blood about the wound. Then he teetered on his toes, and squinted at the ceiling.

"How about ten hours? Say, between eleven-thirty and midnight. How's that?"

Heath laughed good-naturedly.

"You hit it, doc—right on the head."

"Well, well! Always was a good guesser." Doctor Doremus seemed wholly indifferent.

Vance had followed Markham into the hall.

"An honest fellow, that archiater of yours. And to think he's a public servant of our beneficent government!"

"There are many honest men in public office," Markham reproved him.

"I know," sighed Vance. "Our democracy is still young. Give it time."

Heath joined us, and at the same moment the nurse appeared at Mrs. Greene's door. A querulous dictatorial voice issued from the depths of the room behind her.

". . . And you tell whoever's in charge that I want to see him—right away, do you understand! It's an outrage, all this commotion and excitement,

with me lying here in pain trying to get a little rest. Nobody shows me any consideration."

Heath made a grimace and looked toward the stairs; but Vance took Markham's arm.

"Come, let's cheer up the old lady."

As we entered the room, Mrs. Greene, propped up as usual in bed with a prismatic assortment of pillows, drew her shawl primly about her.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she greeted us, her expression moderating. "I thought it was those abominable policemen making free with my house again. . . . What's the meaning of all this disturbance, Mr. Markham? Nurse tells me that Chester has been shot. Dear, dear! If people must do such things, why do they have to come to my house and annoy a poor helpless old woman like me? There are plenty of other places they could do their shooting in." She appeared deeply resentful at the fact that the murderer should have been so inconsiderate as to choose the Greene mansion for his depredations. "But I've come to expect this sort of thing. Nobody thinks of *my* feelings. And if my own children see fit to do everything they can to annoy me, why should I expect total strangers to show me any consideration?"

"When one is bent on murder, Mrs. Greene," rejoined Markham, stung by her callousness, "one doesn't stop to think of the mere inconvenience his crime may cause others."

"I suppose not," she murmured self-pityingly. "But it's all the fault of my children. If they were what children ought to be, people wouldn't be breaking in here trying to murder them."

"And unfortunately succeeding," added Markham coldly.

"Well, that can't be helped." She suddenly became bitter. "It's their punishment for the way they've treated their poor old mother, lying here for ten long years, hopelessly paralyzed. And do you think they try to make it easy for me? No! Here I must stay, day after day, suffering agonies with my spine; and they never give me a thought." A sly look came into her fierce old eyes. "But they think about me sometimes. Oh, yes! They think how nice it would be if I were out of the way. Then they'd get all my money. . . ."

"I understand, madam," Markham put in abruptly, "that you were asleep last night at the time your son met his death."

"Was I? Well, maybe I was. It's a wonder, though, that some one didn't leave my door open just so I'd be disturbed."

"And you know no one who would have any reason to kill your son?"

"How should I know? Nobody tells me anything. I'm a poor neglected, lonely old cripple. . . ."

"Well, we won't bother you any further, Mrs. Greene." Markham's tone held something both of sympathy and consternation.

As we descended the stairs the nurse reopened the door we had just closed after us, and left it ajar, no doubt in response to an order from her patient.

"Not at all a nice old lady," chuckled Vance, as we entered the drawing-room. "For a moment, Markham, I thought you were going to box her ears."

"I admit I felt like it. And yet I couldn't help pitying her. However, such utter self-concentration as hers saves one a lot of mental anguish. She seems to regard this whole damnable business as a plot to upset her."

Sproot appeared obsequiously at the door.

"May I bring you gentlemen some coffee?" No emotion of any kind showed on his graven wrinkled face. The events of the past few days seemed not to have affected him in any degree.

"No, we don't want coffee, Sproot," Markham told him brusquely. "But please be good enough to ask Miss Sibella if she will come here."

"Very good, sir."

The old man shuffled away, and a few minutes later Sibella strolled in, smoking a cigarette, one hand in the pocket of her vivid-green sweater-jacket. Despite her air of nonchalance her face was pale, its whiteness contrasting strongly with the deep crimson rouge on her lips. Her eyes, too, were slightly haggard; and when she spoke her voice sounded forced, as if she were playing a rôle against which her spirit was at odds. She greeted us blithely enough, however.

"Good morning, one and all. Beastly auspices for a social call." She sat down on the arm of a chair and swung one leg restlessly. "Some one certainly has a grudge against us Greenes. Poor old Chet! He didn't even die with his boots on. Felt bedroom slippers! What an end for an outdoor enthusiast!—Well, I suppose I'm invited here to tell my story. Where do I begin?" She rose, and throwing her half-burned cigarette into the grate,

seated herself in a straight-backed chair facing Markham, folding her sinewy, tapering hands on the table before her.

Markham studied her for several moments.

"You were awake last night, reading in bed, I understand, when the shot was fired in your brother's room."

"Zola's 'Nana,' to be explicit. Mother told me I shouldn't read it; so I got it at once. It was frightfully disappointing, though."

"And just what did you do after you heard the report?" continued Markham, striving to control his annoyance at the girl's flippancy.

"I put my book down, got up, donned a kimono, and listened for several minutes at the door. Not hearing anything further, I peeked out. The hall was dark, and the silence felt a bit spooky. I knew I ought to go to Chet's room and inquire, in a sisterly fashion, about the explosion; but, to tell you the truth, Mr. Markham, I was rather cowardly. So I went—oh, well, let the truth prevail: I *ran* up the servants' stairs and routed out our Admirable Crichton; and together we investigated. Chet's door was unlocked, and the fearless Sproot opened it. There sat Chet, looking as if he'd seen a ghost; and somehow I knew he was dead. Sproot went in and touched him, while I waited; and then we went down to the dining-room. Sproot did some phoning, and afterward made me some atrocious coffee. A half-hour or so later this gentleman"—she inclined her head toward Heath—"arrived, looking distressingly glum, and very sensibly refused a cup of Sproot's coffee."

"And you heard no sound of any kind before the shot?"

"Not a thing. Everybody had gone to bed early. The last sound I heard in this house was mother's gentle and affectionate voice telling the nurse she was as neglectful as the rest of us, and to bring her morning tea at nine sharp, and not to slam the door the way she always did. Then peace and quiet reigned until half past eleven, when I heard the shot in Chet's room."

"How long was this interregnum of quietude?" asked Vance.

"Well, mother generally ends her daily criticism of the family around ten-thirty; so I'd say the quietude lasted about an hour."

"And during that time you do not recall hearing a slight shuffling sound in the hall? Or a door closing softly?"

The girl shook her head indifferently, and took another cigarette from a small amber case she carried in her sweater-pocket.

"Sorry, but I didn't. That doesn't mean, though, that people couldn't have been shuffling and shutting doors all over the place. My room's at the rear, and the noises on the river and in 52d Street drown out almost anything that's going on in the front of the house."

Vance had gone to her and held a match to her cigarette.

"I say, you don't seem in the least worried."

"Oh, why worry?" She made a gesture of resignation. "If anything is to happen to me, it'll happen, whatever I do. But I don't anticipate an im-

mediate demise. No one has the slightest reason for killing me—unless, of course, it's some of my former bridge partners. But they're all harmless persons who wouldn't be apt to take extreme measures."

"Still"—Vance kept his tone inconsequential—"no one apparently had any reason for harming your two sisters or your brother."

"On that point I couldn't be altogether lucid. We Greenes don't confide in one another. There's a beastly spirit of distrust in this ancestral domain. We all lie to each other on general principles. And as for secrets! Each member of the family is a kind of Masonic Order in himself. Surely there's some reason for all these shootings. I simply can't imagine any one indulging himself in this fashion for the mere purpose of pistol practice."

She smoked a moment pensively, and went on:

"Yes, there must be a motive back of it all—though for the life of me I can't suggest one. Of course Julia was a vinegary, unpleasant person, but she went out very little, and worked off her various complexes on the family. And yet, she may have been leading a double life for all I know. When these sour old maids break loose from their inhibitions I understand they do the most utterly utter things. But I just can't bring my mind to picture Julia with a bevy of jealous Romeos." She made a comical grimace at the thought. "Ada, on the other hand, is what we used to call in algebra an unknown quantity. No one but dad knew where she came from, and he would never tell. To be sure, she doesn't get much time to run around—mother keeps her too busy. But she's young and good-

looking in a common sort of way"—there was a tinge of venom in this remark—"and you can't tell what connections she may have formed outside the sacred portals of the Greene mansion.—As for Chet, no one seemed to love him passionately. I never heard anybody say a good word for him but the golf pro at the club, and that was only because Chet tipped him like a *parvenu*. He had a genius for antagonizing people. Several motives for the shooting might be found in his past."

"I note that you've changed your ideas considerably in regard to the culpability of Miss Ada." Vance spoke incuriously.

Sibella looked a little shamefaced.

"I did get a bit excited, didn't I?" Then a defiance came into her voice. "But just the same, she doesn't belong here. And she's a sneaky little cat. She'd dearly love to see us all nicely murdered. The only person that seems to like her is cook; but then, Gertrude's a sentimental German who likes everybody. She feeds half the stray cats and dogs in the neighborhood. Our rear yard is a regular pound in summer."

Vance was silent for a while. Suddenly he looked up.

"I gather from your remarks, Miss Greene, that you now regard the shootings as the acts of some one from the outside."

"Does any one think anything else?" she asked, with startled anxiety. "I understand there were footprints in the snow both times we were visited. Surely they would indicate an outsider."

"Quite true," Vance assured her, a bit overem-

phatically, obviously striving to allay whatever fears his queries may have aroused in her. "Those footprints undeniably indicate that the intruder entered each time by the front door."

"And you are not to have any uneasiness about the future, Miss Greene," added Markham. "I shall give orders to-day to have a strict guard placed over the house, front and rear, until there is no longer the slightest danger of a recurrence of what has taken place here."

Heath nodded his unqualified approbation.

"I'll arrange for that, sir. There'll be two men guarding this place day and night from now on."

"How positively thrilling!" exclaimed Sibella; but I noticed a strange reservation of apprehension in her eyes.

"We won't detain you any longer, Miss Greene," said Markham, rising. "But I'd greatly appreciate it if you would remain in your room until our inquiries here are over. You may, of course, visit your mother."

"Thanks awf'ly, but I think I'll indulge in a little lost beauty sleep." And she left us with a friendly wave of the hand.

"Who do you want to see next, Mr. Markham?" Heath was on his feet, vigorously relighting his cigar.

But before Markham could answer Vance lifted his hand for silence, and leaned forward in a listening attitude.

"Oh, Sproot!" he called. "Step in here a moment."

The old butler appeared at once, calm and sub-

servient, and waited with a vacuously expectant expression.

"Really, y' know," said Vance, "there's not the slightest need for you to hover solicitously amid the draperies of the hallway while we're busy in here. Most considerate and loyal of you; but if we want you for anything we'll ring."

"As you desire, sir."

Sproot started to go, but Vance halted him.

"Now that you're here you might answer one or two questions."

"Very good, sir."

"First, I want you to think back very carefully, and tell me if you observed anything unusual when you locked up the house last night."

"Nothing, sir," the man answered promptly. "If I had, I would have mentioned it to the police this morning."

"And did you hear any noise or movement of any kind after you had gone to your room? A door closing, for instance?"

"No, sir. Everything was very quiet."

"And what time did you actually go to sleep?"

"I couldn't say exactly, sir. Perhaps about twenty minutes past eleven, if I may venture to make a guess."

"And were you greatly surprised when Miss Sibella woke you up and told you a shot had been fired in Mr. Chester's room?"

"Well, sir," Sproot admitted, "I was somewhat astonished, though I endeavored to conceal my emotions."

"And doubtless succeeded admirably," said Vance dryly. "But what I meant was this: did you not anticipate something of the kind happening again in this house, after the other shootings?"

He watched the old butler sharply, but the man's lineaments were as arid as a desert and as indecipherable as an expanse of sea.

"If you will pardon me, sir, for saying so, I don't know precisely what you mean," came the colorless answer. "Had I anticipated that Mr. Chester was to be done in, so to speak, I most certainly would have warned him. It would have been my duty, sir."

"Don't evade my question, Sproot." Vance spoke sternly. "I asked you if you had any idea that a second tragedy might follow the first."

"Tragedies very seldom come singly, sir, if I may be permitted to say so. One never knows what will happen next. I try not to anticipate the workings of fate, but I strive to hold myself in readiness——"

"Oh, go away, Sproot—go quite away," said Vance. "When I crave vague rhetoric I'll read Thomas Aquinas."

"Yes, sir." The man bowed with wooden courtesy, and left us.

His footsteps had scarcely died away when Doctor Doremus strode in jauntily.

"There's your bullet, Sergeant." He tossed a tiny cylinder of discolored lead on the drawing-room table. "Nothing but dumb luck. It entered the fifth intercostal space and travelled diagonally across the heart, coming out in the post-axillary fold at the anterior border of the trapezius muscle, where I

could feel it under the skin; and I picked it out with my pen-knife."

"All that fancy language don't worry me," grinned Heath, "so long's I got the bullet."

He picked it up and held it in the palm of his hand, his eyes narrowed, his mouth drawn into a straight line. Then, reaching into his waistcoat pocket, he took out two other bullets, and laid them beside the first. Slowly he nodded, and extended the sinister exhibits to Markham.

"There's the three shots that were fired in this house," he said. "They're all .32-revolver bullets—just alike. You can't get away from it, sir: all three people here were shot with the same gun."

CHAPTER X

THE CLOSING OF A DOOR

(Friday, November 12; 9.30 a. m.)

As Heath spoke Sproot passed down the hall and opened the front door, admitting Doctor Von Blon.

"Good morning, Sproot," we heard him say in his habitually pleasant voice. "Anything new?"

"No, sir, I think not." The reply was expressionless. "The District Attorney and the police are here.—Let me take your coat, sir."

Von Blon glanced into the drawing-room, and, on seeing us, halted and bowed. Then he caught sight of Doctor Doremus, whom he had met on the night of the first tragedy.

"Ah, good morning, doctor," he said, coming forward. "I'm afraid I didn't thank you for the assistance you gave me with the young lady the other night. Permit me to make amends."

"No thanks needed," Doremus assured him. "How's the patient getting on?"

"The wound's filling in nicely. No sepsis. I'm going up now to have a look at her." He turned inquiringly to the District Attorney. "No objection, I suppose."

"None whatever, doctor," said Markham. Then he rose quickly. "We'll come along, if you don't mind. There are a few questions I'd like to ask Miss Ada, and it might be as well to do it while you're present."

Von Blon gave his consent without hesitation.

"Well, I'll be on my way—work to do," announced Doremus breezily. He lingered long enough, however, to shake hands with all of us; and then the front door closed on him.

"We'd better ascertain if Miss Ada has been told of her brother's death," suggested Vance, as we went up the stairs. "If not, I think that task logically devolves on you, doctor."

The nurse, whom Sproot had no doubt apprised of Von Blon's arrival, met us in the upper hall and informed us that, as far as she knew, Ada was still ignorant of Chester's murder.

We found the girl sitting up in bed, a magazine lying across her knees. Her face was still pale, but a youthful vitality shone from her eyes, which attested to the fact that she was much stronger. She seemed alarmed at our sudden appearance, but the sight of the doctor tended to reassure her.

"How do you feel this morning, Ada?" he asked with professional geniality. "You remember these gentlemen, don't you?"

She gave us an apprehensive look; then smiled faintly and bowed.

"Yes, I remember them. . . . Have they—found out anything about—Julia's death?"

"I'm afraid not." Von Blon sat down beside her and took her hand. "Something else has happened that you will have to know, Ada." His voice was studiously sympathetic. "Last night Chester met with an accident——"

"An accident—oh!" Her eyes opened wide, and a slight tremor passed over her. "You mean. . . ."

Her voice quavered and broke. "I know what you mean! . . . Chester's dead!"

Von Blon cleared his throat and looked away.

"Yes, Ada. You must be brave and not let it—ah—upset you too much. You see——"

"He was shot!" The words burst from her lips, and a look of terror overspread her face. "Just like Julia and me." Her eyes stared straight ahead, as if fascinated by some horror which she alone could see.

Von Blon was silent, and Vance stepped to the bed.

"We're not going to lie to you, Miss Greene," he said softly. "You have guessed the truth."

"And what about Rex—and Sibella?"

"They're all right," Vance assured her. "But why did you think your brother had met the same fate as Miss Julia and yourself?"

She turned her gaze slowly to him.

"I don't know—I just felt it. Ever since I was a little girl I've imagined horrible things happening in this house. And the other night I felt that the time had come—oh, I don't know how to explain it; but it was like having something happen that you'd been expecting."

Vance nodded understandingly.

"It's an unhealthy old house; it puts all sorts of weird notions in one's head. But, of course," he added lightly, "there's nothing supernatural about it. It's only a coincidence that you should have felt that way and that these disasters should actually have occurred. The police, y' know, think it was a burglar."

The girl did not answer, and Markham leaned forward with a reassuring smile.

"And we are going to have two men guarding the house all the time from now on," he said, "so that no one can get in who hasn't a perfect right to be here."

"So you see, Ada," put in Von Blon, "you have nothing to worry about any more. All you have to do now is to get well."

But her eyes did not leave Markham's face.

"How do you know," she asked, in a tense anxious voice, "that the—the person came in from the outside?"

"We found his footprints both times on the front walk."

"Footprints—are you sure?" She put the question eagerly.

"No doubt about them. They were perfectly plain, and they belonged to the person who came here and tried to shoot you.—Here, Sergeant"—he beckoned to Heath—"show the young lady that pattern."

Heath took the Manila envelope from his pocket and extracted the cardboard impression Snitkin had made. Ada took it in her hand and studied it, and a little sigh of relief parted her lips.

"And you notice," smiled Vance, "he didn't have very dainty feet."

The girl returned the pattern to the Sergeant. Her fear had left her, and her eyes cleared of the vision that had been haunting them.

"And now, Miss Greene," went on Vance, in a matter-of-fact voice, "we want to ask a few questions. First of all: the nurse said you went to sleep at nine o'clock last night. Is that correct?"

"I pretended to, because nurse was tired and mother was complaining a lot. But I really didn't go to sleep until hours later."

"But you didn't hear the shot in your brother's room?"

"No. I must have been asleep by then."

"Did you hear anything before that?"

"Not after the family had gone to bed and Sproot had locked up."

"Were you awake very long after Sproot retired?"

The girl pondered a moment, frowning.

"Maybe an hour," she ventured finally. "But I don't know."

"It couldn't have been much over an hour," Vance pointed out; "for the shot was fired shortly after half past eleven.—And you heard nothing—no sound of any kind in the hall?"

"Why, no." The look of fright was creeping back into her face. "Why do you ask?"

"Your brother Rex," explained Vance, "said he heard a faint shuffling sound and a door closing a little after eleven."

Her eyelids drooped, and her free hand tightened over the edge of the magazine she was holding.

"A door closing. . . ." She repeated the words in a voice scarcely audible. "Oh! And Rex heard it?" Suddenly she opened her eyes and her lips fell apart. A startled memory had taken possession of her—a memory which quickened her breathing and filled her with alarm. "I heard that door close, too! I remember it now. . . ."

"What door was it?" asked Vance, with subdued animation. "Could you tell where the sound came from?"

The girl shook her head.

"No—it was so soft. I'd even forgotten it until

now. But I heard it! . . . Oh, what did it mean?"

"Nothing probably." Vance assumed an air of inconsequentiality calculated to alleviate her fears. "The wind doubtless."

But when we left her, after a few more questions, I noticed that her face still held an expression of deep anxiety.

Vance was unusually thoughtful as we returned to the drawing-room.

"I'd give a good deal to know what that child knows or suspects," he murmured.

"She's been through a trying experience," returned Markham. "She's frightened, and she sees new dangers in everything. But she couldn't suspect anything, or she'd be only too eager to tell us."

"I wish I were sure of that."

The next hour or so was occupied with interrogating the two maids and the cook. Markham cross-examined them thoroughly not only concerning the immediate events touching upon the two tragedies, but in regard to the general conditions in the Greene household. Numerous family episodes in the past were gone over; and when his inquiries were finished he had obtained a fairly good idea of the domestic atmosphere. But nothing that could be even remotely connected with the murders came to light There had always been, it transpired, an abundance of hatred and ill-feeling and vicious irritability in the Greene mansion. The story that was unfolded by the servants was not a pleasant one; it was a record—scrappy and desultory, but none the less appalling—of daily clashes, complainings, bitter words, sullen silences, jealousies and threats.

Most of the details of this unnatural situation were supplied by Hemming, the older maid. She was less ecstatic than during the first interview, although she interspersed her remarks with Biblical quotations and references to the dire fate which the Lord had seen fit to visit upon her sinful employers. Nevertheless, she painted an arresting, if overcolored and prejudiced, picture of the life that had gone on about her during the past ten years. But when it came to explaining the methods employed by the Almighty in visiting his vengeance upon the unholy Greenes, she became indefinite and obscure. At length Markham let her go after she had assured him that she intended to remain at her post of duty—to be, as she expressed it, "a witness for the Lord" when his work of righteous devastation was complete.

Barton, the younger maid, on the other hand, announced, in no uncertain terms, that she was through with the Greenes forever. The girl was genuinely frightened, and, after Sibella and Sproot had been consulted, she was paid her wages and told she could pack her things. In less than half an hour she had turned in her key and departed with her luggage. Such information as she left behind her was largely a substantiation of Hemming's outpourings. She, though, did not regard the two murders as the acts of an outraged God. Hers was a more practical and mundane view.

"There's something awful funny going on here," she had said, forgetting for the moment the urge of her coquettish spirits. "The Greenes are queer people. And the servants are queer, too—what with Mr. Sproot reading books in foreign languages, and

Hemming preaching about fire and brimstone, and cook going around in a sort of trance muttering to herself and never answering a civil question. And such a family!" She rolled her eyes. "Mrs. Greene hasn't got any heart. She's a regular old witch, and she looks at you sometimes as though she'd like to strangle you. If I was Miss Ada I'd have gone crazy long ago. But then, Miss Ada's no better than the rest. She acts nice and gentle like, but I've seen her stamping up and down in her room looking like a very devil; and once she used language to me what was that bad I put my fingers in my ears. And Miss Sibella's a regular icicle—except when she gets mad, and then she'd kill you if she dared, and laugh about it. And there's been something funny about her and Mr. Chester. Ever since Miss Julia and Miss Ada were shot they've been talking to each other in the sneakiest way when they thought no one was looking. And this Doctor Von Blon what comes here so much: he's a deep one. He's been in Miss Sibella's room with the door shut lots of times when she wasn't any more sick than you are. And Mr. Rex, now. He's a queer man, too. I get the creeps every time he comes near me." She shuddered by way of demonstration. "Miss Julia wasn't as queer as the rest. She just hated everybody and was mean."

Barton had rambled on loquaciously with all the thoughtless exaggeration of a gossip who felt herself outraged; and Markham had not interrupted her. He was trying to dredge up some nugget from the mass of her verbal silt; but when at last he sifted it all down there remained nothing but a few shining grains of scandal.

The cook was even less enlightening. Taciturn by nature, she became almost inarticulate when approached on the subject of the crime. Her stolid exterior seemed to cloak a sullen resentment at the fact that she should be questioned at all. In fact, as Markham patiently pressed his examination, the impression grew on me that her lack of responsiveness was deliberately defensive, as if she had steeled herself to reticency. Vance, too, sensed this attitude in her, for, during a pause in the interview, he moved his chair about until he faced her directly.

"Frau Mannheim," he said, "the last time we were here you mentioned the fact that Mr. Tobias Greene knew your husband, and that, because of their acquaintance, you applied for a position here when your husband died."

"And why shouldn't I?" she asked stubbornly. "I was poor, and I didn't have any other friends."

"Ah, friends!" Vance caught up the word. "And since you were once on friendly terms with Mr. Greene, you doubtless know certain things about his past, which may have some bearing on the present situation; for it is not at all impossible, d' ye see, that the crimes committed here during the past few days are connected with matters that took place years ago. We don't know this, of course, but we'd be very much gratified if you would try to help us in this regard."

As he was speaking the woman had drawn herself up. Her hands had tightened as they lay folded in her lap, and the muscles about her mouth had stiffened.

"I don't know anything," was her only answer.

"How," asked Vance evenly, "do you account for the rather remarkable fact that Mr. Greene gave orders that you were to remain here as long as you cared to?"

"Mr. Greene was a very kind and generous man," she asserted, in a flat, combative voice. "Some there were that thought him hard, and accused him of being unjust; but he was always good to me and mine."

"How well did he know Mr. Mannheim?"

There was a pause, and the woman's eyes looked blankly ahead.

"He helped my husband once, when he was in trouble."

"How did he happen to do this?"

There was another pause, and then:

"They were in some deal together—in the old country." She frowned and appeared uneasy.

"When was this?"

"I don't remember. It was before I was married."

"And where did you first meet Mr. Greene?"

"At my home in New Orleans. He was there on business—with my husband."

"And, I take it, he befriended you also."

The woman maintained a stubborn silence.

"A moment ago," pursued Vance, "you used the phrase 'me and mine.'—Have you any children, Mrs. Mannheim?"

For the first time during the interview her face radically changed expression. An angry gleam shone in her eyes.

"No!" The denial was like an ejaculation.

Vance smoked lethargically for several moments.

"You lived in New Orleans until the time of your employment in this house?" he finally asked.

"Yes."

"And your husband died there?"

"Yes."

"That was thirteen years ago, I understand. —How long before that had it been since you had seen Mr. Greene?"

"About a year."

"So that would be fourteen years ago."

An apprehension, bordering on fear, showed through the woman's morose calmness.

"And you came all the way to New York to seek Mr. Greene's help," mused Vance. "Why were you so confident that he would give you employment after your husband's death?"

"Mr. Greene was a very good man," was all she would say.

"He had perhaps," suggested Vance, "done some other favor for you which made you think you could count on his generosity—eh, what?"

"That's neither here nor there." Her mouth closed tightly.

Vance changed the subject.

"What do you think about the crimes that have been committed in this house?"

"I don't think about them," she mumbled; but the anxiety in her voice belied the assertion.

"You surely must hold some opinion, Mrs. Mannheim, having been here so long." Vance's intent gaze did not leave the woman. "Who, do you think, would have had any reason for wanting to harm these people?"

Suddenly her self-control gave way.

"*Du lieber Herr Jesus!* I don't know—I don't know!" It was like a cry of anguish. "Miss Julia and Mr. Chester maybe—*gewiss*, one could understand. They hated everybody; they were hard, unloving. But little Ada—*der süsse Engel!* Why should they want to harm her!" She set her face grimly, and slowly her expression of stolidity returned.

"Why, indeed?" A note of sympathy was evident in Vance's voice. After a pause he rose and went to the window. "You may return to your room now, Frau Mannheim," he said, without turning. "We sha'n't let anything further happen to little Ada."

The woman got up heavily and, with an uneasy glance in Vance's direction, left the room.

As soon as she was out of hearing Markham swung about.

"What's the use of raking up all this ancient history?" he demanded irritably. "We're dealing with things that have taken place within the past few days; and you waste valuable time trying to find out why Tobias Greene hired a cook thirteen years ago."

"There's such a thing as cause and effect," offered Vance mildly. "And frequently there's a dashed long interval between the two."

"Granted. But what possible connection can this German cook have with the present murders?"

"Perhaps none." Vance strode back across the room, his eyes on the floor. "But, Markham old dear, nothing appears to have any connection with this débâcle. And, on the other hand, everything seems to have a possible relationship. The whole

nouse is steeped in vague meanings. A hundred shadowy hands are pointing to the culprit, and the moment you try to determine the direction the hands disappear. It's a nightmare. Nothing means anything; therefore, anything may have a meaning."

"My dear Vance! You're not yourself." Markham's tone was one of annoyance and reproach. "Your remarks are worse than the obscure ramblings of the sibyls. What if Tobias Greene did have dealings with one Mannheim in the past? Old Tobias indulged in numerous shady transactions, if the gossip of twenty-five or thirty years ago can be credited.* He was forever scurrying to the ends of the earth on some mysterious mission, and coming home with his pockets lined. And it's common knowledge that he spent considerable time in Germany. If you try to dig up his past for possible explanations for the present business, you'll have your hands full."

"You misconstrue my vagaries," returned Vance, pausing before the old oil-painting of Tobias Greene over the fireplace. "I repudiate all ambition to become the family historian of the Greenes. . . . Not a bad head on Tobias," he commented, adjusting his monocle and inspecting the portrait. "An interestin' character. Dynamic forehead, with more than a suggestion of the scholar. A rugged, prying nose. Yes, Tobias no doubt fared forth on many an adventurous quest. A cruel mouth, though—rather sinister, in fact. I wish the whiskers permitted one a view of the chin. It was round, with a deep cleft,

* I remember, back in the nineties, when I was a schoolboy, hearing my father allude to certain picturesque tales of Tobias Greene's escapades.

I'd say—the substance of which Chester's chin was but the simulacrum."

"Very edifying," sneered Markham. "But phrenology leaves me cold this morning.—Tell me, Vance: are you laboring under some melodramatic notion that old Mannheim may have been resurrected and returned to wreak vengeance on the Greene progeny for wrongs done him by Tobias in the dim past? I can't see any other reason for the questions you put to Mrs. Mannheim. Don't overlook the fact, however, that Mannheim's dead."

"I didn't attend the funeral." Vance sank lazily again in his chair.

"Don't be so unutterably futile," snapped Markham. "What's going through your head?"

"An excellent figure of speech! It expresses my mental state perfectly. Numberless things are 'going through my head.' But nothing remains there. My brain's a veritable sieve."

Heath projected himself into the discussion.

"My opinion is, sir, that the Mannheim angle of this affair is a washout. We're dealing with the present, and the bird that did this shooting is somewheres around here right now."

"You're probably right, Sergeant," conceded Vance. "But—my word!—it strikes me that every angle of the case—and, for that matter, every cusp, arc, tangent, parabola, sine, radius, and hyperbole —is hopelessly inundated."

CHAPTER XI

A PAINFUL INTERVIEW

(Friday, November 12; 11 a. m.)

Markham glanced impatiently at his watch.

"It's getting late," he complained, "and I have an important appointment at noon. I think I'll have a go at Rex Greene, and then leave matters in your hands for the time being, Sergeant. There's nothing much to be done here now, and your routine work must be gone through with."

Heath got up gloomily.

"Yes; and one of the first things to be done is to go over this house with a fine-tooth comb for that revolver. If we could find that gun we'd be on our way."

"I don't want to damp your ardor, Sergeant," drawled Vance, "but something whispers in my ear that the weapon you yearn for is going to prove dashed elusive."

Heath looked depressed; he was obviously of Vance's opinion.

"A hell of a case this is! Not a lead—nothing to get your teeth in."

He went to the archway and yanked the bell-cord viciously. When Sproot appeared he almost barked his demand that Mr. Rex Greene be produced at

once; and he stood looking truculently after the retreating butler as if longing for an excuse to follow up his order with violence.

Rex came in nervously, a half-smoked cigarette hanging from his lips. His eyes were sunken; his cheeks sagged, and his short splay fingers fidgeted with the hem of his smoking-jacket, like those of a man under the influence of hyoscine. He gave us a resentful, half-frightened gaze, and planted himself aggressively before us, refusing to take the seat Markham indicated. Suddenly he demanded fiercely:

"Have you found out yet who killed Julia and Chester?"

"No," Markham admitted; "but we've taken every precaution against any recurrence. . . ."

"Precaution? What have you done?"

"We've stationed a man both front and rear——"

A cackling laugh cut him short.

"A lot of good that'll do! The person who's after us Greenes has a key. He has a key, I tell you! And he can get in whenever he wants to, and nobody can stop him."

"I think you exaggerate a little," returned Markham mildly. "In any case, we hope to put our hands on him very soon. And that's why I've asked you here again—it's quite possible that you can help us."

"What do I know?" The man's words were defiant, and he took several long inhalations on his cigarette, the ashes of which fell upon his jacket unnoticed.

"You were asleep, I understand, when the shot was fired last night," went on Markham's quiet voice; "but Sergeant Heath tells me you were awake until

after eleven and heard noises in the hall. Suppose you tell us just what happened."

"Nothing happened!" Rex blurted. "I went to bed at half past ten, but I was too nervous to sleep. Then, some time later, the moon came out and fell across the foot of the bed; and I got up and pulled down the shade. About ten minutes later I heard a scraping sound in the hall, and directly afterward a door closed softly——"

"Just a moment, Mr. Greene," interrupted Vance. "Can you be a little more definite about that noise? What did it sound like?"

"I didn't pay any attention to it," was the whining reply. "It might have been almost anything. It was like some one laying down a bundle, or dragging something across the floor; or it might have been old Sproot in his bedroom slippers, though it didn't sound like him—that is, I didn't associate him with the sound when I heard it."

"And after that?"

"After that? I lay awake in bed ten or fifteen minutes longer. I was restless and—and expectant; so I turned on the lights to see what time it was, and smoked half a cigarette——"

"It was twenty-five minutes past eleven, I understand."

"That's right. Then a few minutes later I put out the light, and must have gone right to sleep."

There was a pause, and Heath drew himself up aggressively.

"Say, Greene: know anything about fire-arms?" He shot the question out brutally.

Rex stiffened. His lips sagged open, and his cig-

arette fell to the floor. The muscles of his thin jowls twitched, and he glared menacingly at the Sergeant.

"What do you mean?" The words were like a snarl; and I noticed that his whole body was quivering.

"Know what became of your brother's revolver?" pursued Heath relentlessly, thrusting out his jaw.

Rex's mouth was working in a paroxysm of fury and fear, but he seemed unable to articulate.

"Where have you got it hidden?" Again Heath's voice sounded harshly.

"Revolver? . . . Hidden? . . ." At last Rex had succeeded in formulating his words. "You—filthy rotter! If you've got any idea that I have the revolver, go up and tear my room apart and look for it—and be damned to you!" His eyes flashed, and his upper lip lifted over his teeth. But there was fright in his attitude as well as rage.

Heath had leaned forward and was about to say something further, when Vance quickly rose and laid a restraining hand on the Sergeant's arm. He was too late, however, to avoid the thing he evidently hoped to forestall. What Heath had already said had proved sufficient stimulus to bring about a terrible reaction in his victim.

"What do I care what that unspeakable swine says?" he shouted, pointing a palsied finger at the Sergeant. Oaths and vituperation welled shrilly from his twitching lips. His insensate wrath seemed to pass all ordinary bounds. His enormous head was thrust forward like a python's; and his face was cyanosed and contorted.

Vance stood poised, watching him alertly; and Markham had instinctively moved back his chair. Even Heath was startled by Rex's inordinate malignity.

What might have happened I don't know, had not Von Blon at that moment stepped swiftly into the room and placed a restraining hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Rex!" he said, in a calm, authoritative voice. "Get a grip on yourself. You're disturbing Ada."

The other ceased speaking abruptly; but his ferocity of manner did not wholly abate. He shook off the doctor's hand angrily and swung round, facing Von Blon.

"What are you interfering for?" he cried. "You're always meddling in this house, coming here when you're not sent for, and nosing into our affairs. Mother's paralysis is only an excuse. You've said yourself she'll never get well, and yet you keep coming, bringing her medicine and sending bills." He gave the doctor a crafty leer. "Oh, you don't deceive me. I know why you come here! It's Sibella!" Again he thrust out his head and grinned shrewdly. "She'd be a good catch for a doctor, too —wouldn't she? Plenty of money——"

Suddenly he halted. His eyes did not leave Von Blon, but he shrank back and the twitching of his face began once more. A quivering finger went up; and as he spoke his voice rose excitedly.

"But Sibella's money isn't enough. You want ours along with hers. So you're arranging for her to inherit all of it. That's it—that's it! *You're* the one who's been doing all this. . . . Oh, my God!

You've got Chester's gun—you took it! And you've got a key to the house—easy enough for you to have one made. That's how you got in."

Von Blon shook his head sadly and smiled with rueful tolerance. It was an embarrassing moment, but he carried it off well.

"Come, Rex," he said quietly, like a person speaking to a refractory child. "You've said enough——"

"Have I!" cried the youth, his eyes gleaming unnaturally. "You knew Chester had the revolver. You went camping with him the summer he got it—he told me so the other day, after Julia was killed." His beady little eyes seemed to stare from his head; a spasm shook his emaciated body; and his fingers again began worrying the hem of his jacket.

Von Blon stepped swiftly forward and, putting a hand on each of his shoulders, shook him.

"That'll do, Rex!" The words were a sharp command. "If you carry on this way, we'll have to lock you up in an institution."

The threat was uttered in what I considered an unnecessarily brutal tone; but it had the desired effect. A haunting fear showed in Rex's eyes. He seemed suddenly to go limp, and he docilely permitted Von Blon to lead him from the room.

"A sweet specimen, that Rex," commented Vance. "Not a person one would choose for a boon companion. Aggravated macrocephalia—cortical irritation. But I say, Sergeant; really, y' know, you shouldn't have prodded the lad so."

Heath grunted.

"You can't tell me that guy don't know something. And you can bet your sweet life I'm going to search his room damn good for that gun."

"It appears to me," rejoined Vance, "he's too flighty to have planned the massacre in this house. He might blow up under pressure and hit somebody with a handy missile; but I doubt if he'd lay any deep schemes and bide his time."

"He's good and scared about something," persisted Heath morosely.

"Hasn't he cause to be? Maybe he thinks the elusive gunman hereabouts will chose him as the next target."

"If there *is* another gunman, he showed damn bad taste not picking Rex out first." It was evident the Sergeant was still smarting under the epithets that had so recently been directed at him.

Von Blon returned to the drawing-room at this moment, looking troubled.

"I've got Rex quieted," he said. "Gave him five grains of luminal. He'll sleep for a few hours and wake up penitent. I've rarely seen him quite as violent as he was to-day. He's supersensitive—cerebral neurasthenia; and he's apt to fly off the handle. But he's never dangerous." He scanned our faces swiftly. "One of you gentlemen must have said something pretty severe."

Heath looked sheepish. "I asked him where he'd hid the gun."

"Ah!" The doctor gave the Sergeant a look of questioning reproach. "Too bad! We have to be careful with Rex. He's all right so long as he isn't opposed too strongly. But I don't just see, sir, what your object could have been in questioning him about the revolver. You surely don't suspect him of having had a hand in these terrible shootings."

"You tell me who did the shootings, doc," retorted Heath pugnaciously, "and then I'll tell you who I *don't* suspect."

"I regret that I am unable to enlighten you." Von Blon's tone exuded its habitual pleasantness. "But I can assure you Rex had no part in them. They're quite out of keeping with his pathologic state."

"That's the defense of half the high-class killers we get the goods on," countered Heath.

"I see I can't argue with you." Von Blon sighed regretfully, and turned an engaging countenance in Markham's direction. "Rex's absurd accusations puzzled me deeply, but, since this officer admits he practically accused the boy of having the revolver, the situation becomes perfectly clear. A common form of instinctive self-protection, this attempting to shift blame on others. You can see, of course, that Rex was merely trying to turn suspicion upon me so as to free himself. It's unfortunate, for he and I were always good friends. Poor Rex!"

"By the by, doctor," came Vance's indolent voice; "that point about your being with Mr. Chester Greene on the camping-trip when he first secured the gun: was that correct? Or was it merely a fancy engendered by Rex's self-protective instinct?"

Von Blon smiled with faultless urbanity and, putting his head a little on one side, appeared to recall the past.

"It may be correct," he admitted. "I was once with Chester on a camping-trip. Yes, it's quite likely—though I shouldn't like to state it definitely. It was so long ago."

"Fifteen years, I think, Mr. Greene said. Ah, yes—a long time ago. *Eheu! fugaces, Postume, Postume, labuntur anni.* It's very depressin'. And do you recall, doctor, if Mr. Greene had a revolver along on that particular outing?"

"Since you mention it, I believe I do recall his having one, though again I should choose not to be definite on the subject."

"Perhaps you may recollect if he used it for target practice." Vance's tone was dulcet and uneager. "Popping away at tree-boles and tin cans and what not, don't y' know."

Von Blon nodded reminiscently.

"Ye-es. It's quite possible. . . ."

"And you yourself may have done a bit of desult'ry popping, what?"

"To be sure, I may have." Von Blon spoke musingly, like one recalling childish pranks. "Yes, it's wholly possible."

Vance lapsed into a disinterested silence, and the doctor, after a moment's hesitation, rose.

"I must be going, I'm afraid." And with a gracious bow he started toward the door. "Oh, by the way," he said, pausing, "I almost forgot that Mrs. Greene told me she desired to see you gentlemen before you went. Forgive me if I suggest that it might be wise to humor her. She's something of a dowager, you know, and her invalidism has made her rather irritable and exacting."

"I'm glad you mentioned Mrs. Greene, doctor." It was Vance who spoke. "I've been intending to ask you about her. What is the nature of her paralysis?"

Von Blon appeared surprised.

"Why, a sort of paraplegia dolorosa—that is, a paralysis of the legs and lower part of the body, accompanied by severe pains due to pressure of the indurations on the spinal cord and nerves. No spasticity of the limbs has supervened, however. Came on very suddenly without any premonitory symptoms about ten years ago—probably the result of transverse myelitis. There's nothing really to be done but to keep her as comfortable as possible with symptomatic treatment, and to tone up the heart action. A sixtieth of strychnine three times a day takes care of the circulation."

"Couldn't by any chance be a hysterical akinesia?"

"Good Lord, no! There's no hysteria." Then his eyes widened in amazement. "Oh, I see! No; there's no possibility of recovery, even partial. It's organic paralysis."

"And atrophy?"

"Oh, yes. Muscular atrophy is now pronounced."

"Thank you very much." Vance lay back with half-closed eyes.

"Oh, not at all.—And remember, Mr. Markham, that I always stand ready to help in any way I can. Please don't hesitate to call on me." He bowed again, and went out.

Markham got up and stretched his legs.

"Come; we've been summoned to appear." His facetiousness was a patent effort to shake off the depressing gloom of the case.

Mrs. Greene received us with almost unctuous cordiality.

"I knew you'd grant the request of a poor old

useless cripple," she said, with an appealing smile; "though I'm used to being ignored. No one pays any attention to my wishes."

The nurse stood at the head of the bed arranging the pillows beneath the old lady's shoulders.

"Is that comfortable now?" she asked.

Mrs. Greene made a gesture of annoyance.

"A lot you care whether I'm comfortable or not! Why can't you let me alone, nurse? You're always disturbing me. There was nothing wrong with the pillows. And I don't want you in here now anyway. Go and sit with Ada."

The nurse drew a long, patient breath, and went silently from the room, closing the door behind her.

Mrs. Greene reverted to her former ingratiating manner.

"No one understands my needs the way Ada does, Mr. Markham. What a relief it will be when the dear child gets well enough to care for me again! But I mustn't complain. The nurse does the best she knows how, I suppose.—Please sit down, gentlemen . . . yet what wouldn't I give if I could only stand up the way you can. No one realizes what it means to be a helpless paralytic."

Markham did not avail himself of the invitation, but waited until she had finished speaking and then said:

"Please believe that you have my deepest sympathy, madam. . . . You sent for me, Doctor Von Blon said."

"Yes!" She looked at him calculatingly. "I wanted to ask you a favor."

She paused, and Markham bowed but did not answer.

"I wanted to request you to drop this investigation. I've had enough worry and disturbance as it is. But *I* don't count. It's the family I'm thinking of—the good name of the Greenes." A note of pride came into her voice. "What need is there to drag us through the mire and make us an object of scandalous gossip for the *canaille?* I want peace and quiet, Mr. Markham. I won't be here much longer; and why should my house be overrun with policemen just because Julia and Chester have suffered their just deserts for neglecting me and letting me suffer here alone? I'm an old woman and a cripple, and I'm deserving of a little consideration."

Her face clouded, and her voice became harsh.

"You haven't any right to come here and upset my house and annoy me in this outrageous fashion! I haven't had a minute's rest since all this excitement began, and my spine is paining me so I can hardly breathe." She took several stertorous breaths, and her eyes flashed indignantly. "I don't expect any better treatment from my children—they're hard and thoughtless. But you, Mr. Markham—an outsider, a stranger: why should you want to torture me with all this commotion? It's outrageous—inhuman!"

"I am sorry if the presence of the officers of the law in your house disturbs you," Markham told her gravely; "but I have no alternative. When a crime has been committed it is my duty to investigate, and to use every means at my disposal to bring the guilty person to justice."

"Justice!" The old lady repeated the word scornfully. "Justice has already been done. I've been avenged for the treatment I've received these many years, lying here helpless."

There was something almost terrifying in the woman's cruel and unrelenting hatred of her children, and in the cold-blooded satisfaction she seemed to take in the fact that two of them had been punished by death. Markham, naturally sympathetic, revolted against her attitude.

"However much gratification you may feel at the murder of your son and daughter, madam," he said coldly, "it does not release me from my duty to find the murderer.—Was there anything else you wished to speak to me about?"

For a while she sat silent, her face working with impotent passion. The gaze she bent on Markham was almost ferocious. But presently the vindictive vigilance of her eyes relaxed, and she drew a deep sigh.

"No; you may go now. I have nothing more to say. And, anyway, who cares about an old helpless woman like me? I should have learned by this time that nobody thinks of my comfort, lying here all alone, unable to help myself—a nuisance to every one. . . ."

Her whining, self-pitying voice followed us as we made our escape.

"Y' know, Markham," said Vance, as we came into the lower hall, "the Empress Dowager is not entirely devoid of reason. Her suggestion is deserving of consideration. The clarion voice of duty may summon you to this quest, but—my word!—whither

shall one quest? There's nothing sane in this house —nothing that lends itself to ordin'ry normal reason. Why not take her advice and chuck it? Even if you learn the truth, it's likely to prove a sort of Pyrrhic vict'ry. I'm afraid it'll be more terrible than the crimes themselves."

Markham did not deign to answer; he was familiar with Vance's heresies, and he also knew that Vance himself would be the last person to throw over an unsolved problem.

"We've got something to go on, Mr. Vance," submitted Heath solemnly, but without enthusiasm. "There's those foot-tracks, for instance; and we've got the missing gun to find. Dubois is up-stairs now taking finger-prints. And the reports on the servants'll be coming along soon. There's no telling what'll turn up in a few days. I'll have a dozen men working on this case before night."

"Such zeal, Sergeant! But it's in the atmosphere of this old house—not in tangible clews—that the truth lies hidden. It's somewhere in these old jumbled rooms; it's peering out from dark corners and from behind doors. It's here—in this very hall, perhaps."

His tone was fraught with troubled concern, and Markham looked at him sharply.

"I think you're right, Vance," he muttered. "But how is one to get at it?"

"'Pon my soul, I don't know. How does one get at spectres, anyway? I've never had much intimate intercourse with ghosts, don't y' know."

"You're talking rubbish!" Markham jerked on his overcoat, and turned to Heath. "You go ahead,

Sergeant; and keep in touch with me. If nothing develops from your inquiries, we'll discuss the next step."

And he and Vance and I went out to the waiting car.

CHAPTER XII

A MOTOR RIDE

(November 12—November 25)

The inquiry was pushed according to the best traditions of the Police Department. Captain Carl Hagedorn, the firearms expert,* made a minute scientific examination of the bullets. The same revolver, he found, had fired all three shots: the peculiar rifling told him this; and he was able to state that the revolver was an old Smith & Wesson of a style whose manufacture had been discontinued. But, while these findings offered substantiation to the theory that Chester Greene's missing gun was the one used by the murderer, they added nothing to the facts already established or suspected. Deputy Inspector Conrad Brenner, the burglar-tools expert,† had conducted an exhaustive examination of the scene for evidential signs of a forced entrance, but had found no traces whatever of a housebreaker.

Dubois and his assistant Bellamy—the two leading finger-print authorities of the New York Police Department—went so far as to take finger-prints of

* Captain Hagedorn was the expert who supplied Vance with the technical data in the Benson murder case, which made it possible for him to establish the height of the murderer.

† It was Inspector Brenner who examined and reported on the chiselled jewel-box in the "Canary" murder case.

every member of the Greene household, including Doctor Von Blon; and these were compared with the impressions found in the hallways and in the rooms where the shootings had occurred. But when this tedious process was over not an unidentified print remained; and all those that had been found and photographed were logically accounted for.

Chester Greene's galoshes were taken to Headquarters and turned over to Captain Jerym, who carefully compared them with the measurements and the patterns made by Snitkin. No new fact concerning them, however, was discovered. The tracks in the snow, Captain Jerym reported, had been made either by the galoshes given him or by another pair of the exact size and last. Beyond this statement he could not, he said, conscientiously go.

It was established that no one in the Greene mansion, with the exception of Chester and Rex, owned galoshes; and Rex's were number seven—three sizes smaller than those found in Chester's clothes-closet. Sproot used only storm-rubbers, size eight; and Doctor Von Blon, who affected gaiters in winter, always wore rubber sandals during stormy weather.

The search for the missing revolver occupied several days. Heath turned the task over to men trained especially in this branch of work, and supplied them with a search-warrant in case they should meet with any opposition. But no obstacle was put in their way. The house was systematically ransacked from basement to attic. Even Mrs. Greene's quarters were subjected to a search. The old lady had at first objected, but finally gave her consent, and even seemed a bit disappointed when the men

had finished. The only room that was not gone over was Tobias Greene's library. Owing to the fact that Mrs. Greene had never let the key go out of her possession, and had permitted no one to enter the room since her husband's death, Heath decided not to force the issue when she refused pointblank to deliver the key. Every other nook and corner of the house, however, was combed by the Sergeant's men. But no sign of the revolver rewarded their efforts.

The autopsies revealed nothing at variance with Doctor Doremus's preliminary findings. Julia and Chester had each died instantaneously from the effects of a bullet entering the heart, shot from a revolver held at close range. No other possible cause of death was present in either body; and there were no indications of a struggle.

No unknown or suspicious person had been seen near the Greene mansion on the night of either murder, although several people were found who had been in the neighborhood at the time; and a bootmaker, who lived on the second floor of the Narcoss Flats in 53d Street, opposite to the house, stated that he had been sitting at his window, smoking his bedtime pipe, during the time of both shootings, and could swear that no one had passed down that end of the street.

However, the guard which had been placed over the Greene mansion was not relaxed. Men were on duty day and night at both entrances to the estate, and every one entering or leaving the premises was closely scrutinized. So close a watch was kept that strange tradesmen found it inconvenient and at times difficult to make ordinary deliveries.

The reports that were turned in concerning the servants were unsatisfactory from the standpoint of detail; but all the facts unearthed tended to eliminate each subject from any possible connection with the crimes. Barton, the younger maid, who had quitted the Greene establishment the morning after the second tragedy, proved to be the daughter of respectable working people living in Jersey City. Her record was good, and her companions all appeared to be harmless members of her own class.

Hemming, it turned out, was a widow who, up to the time of her employment with the Greenes, had kept house for her husband, an iron-worker, in Altoona, Pa. She was remembered even there among her former neighbors as a religious fanatic who had led her husband sternly and exultantly in the narrow path of enforced rectitude. When he was killed by a furnace explosion she declared it was the hand of God striking him down for some secret sin. Her associates were few: they were in the main members of a small congregation of East Side Anabaptists.

The summer gardener of the Greenes—a middle-aged Pole named Krimski—was discovered in a private saloon in Harlem, well under the benumbing influence of synthetic whiskey—a state of beatific lassitude he had maintained, with greater or lesser steadfastness, since the end of summer. He was at once eliminated from police consideration.

The investigation into the habits and associates of Mrs. Mannheim and Sproot brought nothing whatever to light. Indeed, the habits of these two were exemplary, and their contacts with the outside world so meagre as to be regarded almost as non-existent.

Sproot had no visible friends, and his acquaintances were limited to an English valet in Park Avenue and the tradespeople of the neighborhood. He was solitary by nature, and what few recreations he permitted himself were indulged in unaccompanied. Mrs. Mannheim had rarely left the premises of the Greene house since she had taken up her duties there at the time of her husband's death, and apparently knew no one in New York outside of the household.

These reports dashed whatever hopes Sergeant Heath may have harbored of finding a solution to the Greene mystery by way of a possible accomplice in the house itself.

"I guess we'll have to give up the idea of an inside job," he lamented one morning in Markham's office a few days after the shooting of Chester Greene.

Vance, who was present, eyed him lazily.

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know, Sergeant. On the contr'ry, it was indubitably an inside job, though not just the variety you have in mind."

"You mean you think some member of the family did it?"

"Well—perhaps: something rather along that line." Vance drew on his cigarette thoughtfully. "But that's not exactly what I meant. It's a situation, a set of conditions—an atmosphere, let us say—that's guilty. A subtle and deadly poison is responsible for the crimes. And that poison is generated in the Greene mansion."

"A swell time I'd have trying to arrest an atmosphere—or a poison either, for the matter of that," snorted Heath.

"Oh, there's a flesh-and-blood victim awaiting your manacles somewhere, Sergeant—the agent, so to speak, of the atmosphere."

Markham, who had been conning the various reports of the case, sighed heavily, and settled back in his chair.

"Well, I wish to Heaven," he interposed bitterly, "that he'd give us some hint as to his identity. The papers are at it hammer and tongs. There's been another delegation of reporters here this morning."

The fact was that rarely had there been in New York's journalistic history a case which had so tenaciously seized upon the public imagination. The shooting of Julia and Ada Greene had been treated sensationally but perfunctorily; but after Chester Greene's murder an entirely different spirit animated the newspaper stories. Here was something romantically sinister—something which brought back forgotten pages of criminal history.* Columns were devoted to accounts of the Greene family history. Genealogical archives were delved into for remote titbits. Old Tobias Greene's record was raked over, and stories of his early life became the common property of the man in the street. Pictures of all the members of the Greene family accompanied these spectacular tales; and the Greene mansion itself, photographed from every possible angle, was

* Among the famous cases mentioned as being in some manner comparable to the Greene shootings were the mass murders of Landru, Jean-Baptiste Troppmann, Fritz Haarmann, and Mrs. Belle Gunness; the tavern murders of the Benders; the Van der Linden poisonings in Holland; the Bela Kiss tin-cask stranglings; the Rugeley murders of Doctor William Palmer; and the beating to death of Benjamin Nathan.

used regularly to illustrate the flamboyant accounts of the crimes so recently perpetrated there.

The story of the Greene murders spread over the entire country, and even the press of Europe found space for it. The tragedy, taken in connection with the social prominence of the family and the romantic history of its progenitors, appealed irresistibly to the morbidity and the snobbery of the public.

It was natural that the police and the District Attorney's office should be hounded by the representatives of the press; and it was also natural that both Heath and Markham should be sorely troubled by the fact that all their efforts to lay hands on the criminal had come to naught. Several conferences had been called in Markham's office, at each of which the ground had been carefully reploughed; but not one helpful suggestion had been turned up. Two weeks after the murder of Chester Greene the case began to take on the aspect of a stalemate.

During that fortnight, however, Vance had not been idle. The situation had caught and held his interest, and not once had he dismissed it from his mind since that first morning when Chester Greene had applied to Markham for help. He said little about the case, but he had attended each of the conferences; and from his casual comments I knew he was both fascinated and perplexed by the problem it presented.

So convinced was he that the Greene mansion itself held the secret to the crimes enacted there that he had made it a point to call at the house several times without Markham. Markham, in fact, had been there but once since the second crime. It was not

that he was shirking his task. There was, in reality, little for him to do; and the routine duties of his office were particularly heavy at that time.*

Sibella had insisted that the funerals of Julia and Chester be combined in one service, which was held in the private chapel of Malcomb's Undertaking Parlors. Only a few intimate acquaintances were notified (though a curious crowd gathered outside the building, attracted by the sensational associations of the obsequies); and the interment at Woodlawn Cemetery was strictly private. Doctor Von Blon accompanied Sibella and Rex to the chapel, and sat with them during the services. Ada, though improving rapidly, was still confined to the house; and Mrs. Greene's paralysis of course made her attendance impossible, although I doubt if she would have gone in any case, for when the suggestion was made that the services be held at home she had vetoed it emphatically.

It was on the day after the funeral that Vance paid his first unofficial visit to the Greene mansion. Sibella received him without any show of surprise.

"I'm so glad you've come," she greeted him, almost gaily. "I knew you weren't a policeman the first time I saw you. Imagine a policeman smoking *Régie* cigarettes! And I'm dying for some one to talk to. Of course, all the people I know avoid me now as they would a pestilence. I haven't had an invitation since Julia passed from this silly life. Re-

* The famous impure-milk scandal was then to the fore, and the cases were just appearing on the court calendar. Also, at that time, there was an anti-gambling campaign in progress in New York; and the District Attorney's office had charge of all the prosecutions.

spect for the dead, I believe they call it. And just when I most need diversion!"

She rang for the butler and ordered tea.

"Sproot makes much better tea than he does coffee, thank Heaven!" she ran on, with a kind of nervous detachment. "What a sweet day we had yesterday! Funerals are hideous farces. I could hardly keep a straight face when the officiating reverend doctor began extolling the glories of the departed. And all the time—poor man—he was eaten up with morbid curiosity. I'm sure he enjoyed it so much that he wouldn't complain if I entirely forgot to send him a check for his kind words. . . ."

The tea was served, but before Sproot had withdrawn Sibella turned to him pettishly.

"I simply can't stand any more tea. I want a Scotch high-ball." She lifted her eyes to Vance inquiringly, but he insisted that he preferred tea; and the girl drank her high-ball alone.

"I crave stimulation these days," she explained airily. "This moated grange, so to speak, is getting on my young and fretful nerves. And the burden of being a celebrity is quite overwhelming. I really have become a celebrity, you know. In fact, all the Greenes are quite famous now. I never imagined a mere murder or two could give a family such positively irrational prominence. I'll probably be in Hollywood yet."

She gave a laugh which struck me as a trifle strained.

"It's just too jolly! Even mother is enjoying it. She gets all the papers and reads every word that's written about us—which is a blessing, let me tell you.

She's almost forgotten to find fault; and I haven't heard a word about her spine for days. The Lord tempers the wind—or is it something about an ill wind I'm trying to quote? I always get my classical references confused. . . ."

She ran on in this flippant vein for half an hour or so. But whether her callousness was genuine or merely a brave attempt to counteract the pall of tragedy that hung over her I couldn't make out. Vance listened, interested and amused. He seemed to sense a certain emotional necessity in the girl to relieve her mind; but long before we went away he had led the conversation round to commonplace matters. When we rose to go Sibella insisted that we come again.

"You're so comforting, Mr. Vance," she said. "I'm sure you're not a moralist; and you haven't once condoled with me over my bereavements. Thank Heaven, we Greenes have no relatives to swoop down on us and bathe us in tears. I'm sure I'd commit suicide if we had."

Vance and I called twice more within the week, and were received cordially. Sibella's high spirits were always the same. If she felt the horror that had descended so suddenly and unexpectedly upon her home, she managed to hide it well. Only in her eagerness to talk freely and in her exaggerated efforts to avoid all sign of mourning did I sense any effects on her of the terrible experience she had been through.

Vance on none of his visits referred directly to the crimes; and I became deeply puzzled by his attitude. He was trying to learn something—of that I was positive. But I failed to see what possible prog-

ress he could make by the casual methods he was pursuing. Had I not known him better I might have suspected him of being personally interested in Sibella; but such a notion I dismissed simultaneously with its formulation. I noticed, however, that after each call he became unaccountably pensive; and one evening, after we had had tea with Sibella, he sat for an hour before the fire in his living-room without turning a page of the volume of da Vinci's "Trattato della Pittura" which lay open before him.

On one of his visits to the Greene mansion he had met and talked with Rex. At first the youth had been surly and resentful of our presence; but before we went away he and Vance were discussing such subjects as Einstein's general-relativity theory, the Moulton-Chamberlin planetesimal hypothesis, and Poincaré's science of numbers, on a plane quite beyond the grasp of a mere layman like myself. Rex had warmed up to the discussion in an almost friendly manner, and at parting had even offered his hand for Vance to shake.

On another occasion Vance had asked Sibella to be permitted to pay his respects to Mrs. Greene. His apologies to her—which he gave a semiofficial flavor—for all the annoyance caused by the police immediately ingratiated him in the old lady's good graces. He was most solicitous about her health, and asked her numerous questions regarding her paralysis—the nature of her spinal pains and the symptoms of her restlessness. His air of sympathetic concern drew from her an elaborate and detailed jeremiad.

Twice Vance talked to Ada, who was now up and

about, but with her arm still in a sling. For some reason, however, the girl appeared almost *farouche* when approached by him. One day when we were at the house Von Blon called, and Vance seemed to go out of his way to hold him in conversation.

As I have said, I could not fathom his motive in all this apparently desultory social give-and-take. He never broached the subject of the tragedies except in the most indirect way; he appeared, rather, to avoid the topic deliberately. But I did notice that, however casual his manner, he was closely studying every one in the house. No nuance of tone, no subtlety of reaction, escaped him. He was, I knew, storing away impressions, analyzing minute phases of conduct, and probing delicately into the psychological mainsprings of each person he talked to.

We had called perhaps four or five times at the Greene mansion when an episode occurred which must be recounted here in order to clarify a later development of the case. I thought little of it at the time, but, though seemingly trivial, it was to prove of the most sinister significance before many days had passed. In fact, had it not been for this episode there is no telling to what awful lengths the gruesome tragedy of the Greenes might have gone; for Vance—in one of those strange mental flashes of his which always seemed wholly intuitive but were, in reality, the result of long, subtle reasoning—remembered the incident at a crucial moment, and related it swiftly to other incidents which in themselves appeared trifling, but which, when co-ordinated, took on a tremendous and terrible importance.

During the second week following Chester Greene's death the weather moderated markedly. We had several beautiful clear days, crisp, sunshiny, and invigorating. The snow had almost entirely disappeared, and the ground was firm, without any of the slush that usually follows a winter thaw. On Thursday Vance and I called at the Greene mansion earlier than on any previous visit, and we saw Doctor Von Blon's car parked before the gate.

"Ah!" Vance observed. "I do hope the family Paracelsus is not departing immediately. The man lures me; and his exact relationship to the Greene family irks my curiosity."

Von Blon, as a matter of fact, was preparing to go as we entered the hallway. Sibella and Ada, bundled in their furs, stood just behind him; and it was evident that they were accompanying him.

"It was such a pleasant day," explained Von Blon, somewhat disconcertedly, "I thought I'd take the girls for a drive."

"And you and Mr. Van Dine must come with us," chimed in Sibella, smiling hospitably at Vance. "If the doctor's temperamental driving affects your heart action, I promise to take the wheel myself. I'm really an expert chauffeur."

I surprised a look of displeasure on Von Blon's face; but Vance accepted the invitation without demur; and in a few moments we were riding across town, comfortably installed in the doctor's big Daimler, with Sibella in front, next to the driver's seat, and Ada between Vance and me in the tonneau.

We went north on Fifth Avenue, entered Central Park, and, emerging at the 72d Street entrance,

headed for Riverside Drive. The Hudson River lay like a sheet of blue-grass below us, and the Jersey palisades in the still clear air of early afternoon were as plainly etched as a Degas drawing. At Dyckman Street we went up Broadway, and turned west on the Spuyten Duyvil Road to Palisade Avenue overlooking the old wooded estates along the water. We passed through a private roadway lined with hedges, turned inland again to Sycamore Avenue, and came out on the Riverdale Road. We drove through Yonkers, up North Broadway into Hastings, and then skirted the Longue Vue Hill. Beyond Dobbs Ferry we entered the Hudson Road, and at Ardsley again turned west beside the Country Club golf-links, and came out on the river level. Beyond the Ardsley Station a narrow dirt road ran up the hill along the water; and, instead of following the main highway to the east, we continued up this little-used road, emerging on a kind of plateau of wild pasture-land.

A mile or so farther on—about midway between Ardsley and Tarrytown—a small dun hill, like a boulder, loomed directly in our path. When we came to the foot of it, the road swung sharply to the west along a curved promontory. The turn was narrow and dangerous, with the steep upward slope of the hill on one side and the precipitous, rocky descent into the river on the other. A flimsy wooden fence had been built along the edge of the drop, though what possible protection it could be to a reckless or even careless driver I could not see.

As we came to the outermost arc of the little detour Von Blon brought the car to a stop, the front

wheels pointing directly toward the precipice. A magnificent vista stretched before us. We could look up and down the Hudson for miles. And there was a sense of isolation about the spot, for the hill behind us completely shut off the country inland.

We sat for several moments taking in the unusual view. Then Sibella spoke. Her voice was whimsical, but a curious note of defiance informed it.

"What a perfectly ripping spot for a murder!" she exclaimed, leaning over and looking down the steep slope of the bluff. "Why run the risk of shooting people when all you have to do is to take them for a ride to this snug little shelf, jump from the car, and let them topple—machine and all—over the precipice? Just another unfortunate auto accident —and no one the wiser! . . . Really, I think I'll take up crime in a serious way."

I felt a shudder pass over Ada's body, and I noticed that her face paled. Sibella's comments struck me as particularly heartless and unthinking in view of the terrible experience through which her sister had so recently passed. The cruelty of her words evidently struck the doctor also, for he turned toward her with a look of consternation.

Vance glanced quickly at Ada, and then attempted to banish the embarrassment of the tense silence by remarking lightly:

"We refuse to take alarm, however, Miss Greene; for no one, d' ye see, could seriously consider a criminal career on a day as perfect as this. Taine's theory of climatic influences is most comfortin' in moments like this."

Von Blon said nothing, but his reproachful eyes did not leave Sibella's face.

"Oh, let us go back!" cried Ada pitifully, nestling closer under the lap-robe, as if the air had suddenly become chill.

Without a word Von Blon reversed the machine; and a moment later we were on our way back to the city.

CHAPTER XIII

THE THIRD TRAGEDY

(November 28 and November 30)

The following Sunday evening, November 28, Markham invited Inspector Moran and Heath to the Stuyvesant Club for an informal conference. Vance and I had dined with him and were present when the two police officials arrived. We retired to Markham's favorite corner of the club's lounge-room; and soon a general discussion of the Greene murders was under way.

"I'm rather amazed," said the Inspector, his voice even quieter than usual, "that nothing has turned up to focus the inquiry. In the average murder case there are numerous lines to be explored, even if the right one is not hit upon immediately. But in this affair there appears to be nothing whatever on which to concentrate."

"That fact in itself, I should say," rejoined Vance, "constitutes a distinguishing characteristic of the case which shouldn't be overlooked, don't y' know. It's a clew of vital importance, and if only we could probe its significance I think we'd be on our way toward a solution."

"A fine clew that is!" grumbled Heath. " 'What clew have you got, Sergeant?' asks the Inspector. 'Oh, a bully clew,' says I. 'And what is it?' asks the Inspector. 'The fact that there ain't *nothing* to go on!' says I."

Vance smiled.

"You're so literal, Sergeant! What I was endeavoring to express, in my purely laic capacity, was this: when there are no clews in a case—no *points de départ*, no tell-tale indications—one is justified in regarding everything as a clew—or, rather, as a factor in the puzzle. To be sure, the great difficulty lies in fitting together these apparently inconsequential pieces. I rather think we've at least a hundred clews in our possession; but none of them has any meaning so long as it's unrelated to the others. This affair is like one of those silly word-puzzles where all the letters are redistributed into a meaningless jumble. The task for the solver is to rearrange them into an intelligible word or sentence."

"Could you name just eight or ten of those hundred clews for me?" Heath requested ironically. "I sure would like to get busy on something definite."

"You know 'em all, Sergeant." Vance refused to fall in with the other's bantering manner. "I'd say that practically everything that has happened since the first alarm reached you might be regarded as a clew."

"Sure!" The Sergeant had lapsed again into sullen gloom. "The footprints, the disappearance of the revolver, that noise Rex heard in the hall. But we've run all those leads up against a blank wall."

"Oh, those things!" Vance sent a ribbon of blue smoke upward. "Yes, they're clews of a kind. But I was referring more specifically to the conditions existing at the Greene mansion—the organisms of the environment there—the psychological elements of the situation."

"Don't get off again on your metaphysical theories and esoteric hypotheses," Markham interjected tartly. "We've either got to find a practical *modus operandi*, or admit ourselves beaten."

"But, Markham old man, you're beaten on the face of it unless you can put your chaotic facts into some kind of order. And the only way you'll be able to do that is by a process of prayerful analysis."

"You give me some facts that've got some sense to 'em," challenged Heath, "and I'll put 'em together soon enough."

"The Sergeant's right," was Markham's comment. "You'll admit that as yet we haven't any significant facts to work with."

"Oh, there'll be more."

Inspector Moran sat up, and his eyes narrowed.

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Vance?" It was obvious that the remark had struck some chord of agreement in him.

"The thing isn't over yet." Vance spoke with unwonted sombreness. "The picture's unfinished. There's more tragedy to come before the monstrous canvas is rounded out. And the hideous thing about it is that there's no way of stopping it. Nothing now can halt the horror that's at work. It's got to go on."

"You feel that, too!" The Inspector's voice was off its normal pitch. "By God! This is the first case I've ever had that frightened me."

"Don't forget, sir," argued Heath, but without conviction, "that we got men watching the house day and night."

"There's no security in that, Sergeant," asserted

Vance. "The killer is already in the house. He's part of the deadly atmosphere of the place. He's been there for years, nourished by the toxins that seep from the very stones of the walls."

Heath looked up.

"A member of the family? You said that once before."

"Not necessarily. But some one who has been tainted by the perverted situation that grew out of old Tobias's patriarchal ideas."

"We might manage to put some one in the house to keep an eye on things," suggested the Inspector. "Or, there's a possibility of prevailing upon the members of the family to separate and move to other quarters."

Vance shook his head slowly.

"A spy in the house would be useless. Isn't every one there a spy now, watching all the others, and watching them with fear and suspicion? And as for dispersing the family: not only would you find old Mrs. Greene, who holds the purse-strings, an adamantine obstacle, but you'd meet all manner of legal complications as a result of Tobias's will. No one gets a dollar, I understand, who doesn't remain in the mansion until the worms have ravaged his carcass for a full quarter of a century. And even if you succeeded in scattering the remnants of the Greene line, and locked up the house, you wouldn't have stamped out the killer. And there'll be no end of this thing until a purifying stake has been driven through his heart."

"Are you going in now for vampirism, Vance?" The case had exacerbated Markham's nerves. "Shall

we draw an enchanted ring around the house and hang garlic on the door?"

Markham's extravagant comment of harassed discouragement seemed to express the hopeless state of mind of all of us, and there was a long silence. It was Heath who first came back to a practical consideration of the matter in hand.

"You spoke, Mr. Vance, about old man Greene's will. And I've been thinking that, if we knew all the terms of that will, we might find something to help us. There's millions in the estate, all of it left, I hear, to the old lady. What I'd like to know is, has she a full right to dispose of it any way she likes? And I'd also like to know what kind of a will the old lady herself has made. With all that money at stake, we might get on to a motive of some kind."

"Quite—quite!" Vance looked at Heath with undisguised admiration. "That's the most sensible suggestion that's been made thus far. I salute you, Sergeant. Yes, old Tobias's money may have some bearing on the case. Not a direct bearing, perhaps; but the influence of that money—the subterranean power it exerts—is undoubtedly tangled up in these crimes.—How about it, Markham? How does one go about finding out about other people's wills?"

Markham pondered the point.

"I don't believe there'd be any great difficulty in the present instance. Tobias Greene's will is a matter of record, of course, though it might take some little time to look it up in the Surrogate's files; and I happen to know old Buckway, the senior partner of Buckway & Aldine, the Greene solicitors. I see him here at the club occasionally, and I've done one

or two small favors for him. I think I could induce him to tell me confidentially the terms of Mrs. Greene's will. I'll see what can be done to-morrow."

Half an hour later the conference broke up and we went home.

"I fear those wills are not going to help much," Vance remarked, as he sipped his high-ball before the fire late that night. "Like everything else in this harrowin' case, they'll possess some significance that can't be grasped until they're fitted into the final picture."

He rose and, going to the book-shelves, took down a small volume.

"And now I think I'll erase the Greenes from my mind *pro tempore*, and dip into the 'Satyricon.' The fusty historians pother frightfully about the reasons for the fall of Rome, whereas the eternal answer is contained in Petronius's imperishable classic of that city's decadence."

He settled himself and turned the pages of his book. But there was no concentration in his attitude, and his eyes wandered constantly from the text.

Two days later—on Tuesday, November 30—Markham telephoned Vance shortly after ten o'clock in the morning, and asked him to come at once to the office. Vance was preparing to attend an exhibition of negro sculpture at the Modern Gallery,* but this indulgence was postponed in view of the District Attorney's urgent call; and in less than half an hour we were at the Criminal Courts Building.

* The Modern Gallery was then under the direction of Marius de Zayas, whose collection of African statuette-fetiches was perhaps the finest in America.

"Ada Greene called up this morning, and asked to see me without delay," explained Markham. "I offered to send Heath out and, if necessary, to come myself later on. But she seemed particularly anxious that I shouldn't do that, and insisted on coming here: said it was a matter she could speak of more freely away from the house. She seemed somewhat upset, so I told her to come ahead. Then I phoned you and notified Heath."

Vance settled himself and lit a cigarette.

"I don't wonder she'd grasp at any chance to shake the atmosphere of her surroundings. And, Markham, I've come to the conclusion that girl knows something that would be highly valuable to our inquiry. It's quite possible, don't y' know, that she's now reached a point where she'll tell us what's on her mind."

As he spoke the Sergeant was announced, and Markham briefly explained the situation to him.

"It looks to me," said Heath gloomily, but with interest, "like it was our only chance of getting a lead. We haven't learned anything ourselves that's worth a damn, and unless somebody spills a few suggestions we're up against it."

Ten minutes later Ada Greene was ushered into the office. Though her pallor had gone and her arm was no longer in a sling, she still gave one the impression of weakness. But there was none of the tremulousness or shrinking in her bearing that had heretofore characterized her.

She sat down before Markham's desk, and for a while frowned up at the sunlight, as if debating how to begin.

"It's about Rex, Mr. Markham," she said finally. "I really don't know whether I should have come here or not—it may be very disloyal of me. . . ." She gave him a look of appealing indecision. "Oh, tell me: if a person knows something—something bad and dangerous—about some one very close and very dear, should that person tell, when it might make terrible trouble?"

"That all depends," Markham answered gravely. "In the present circumstances, if you know anything that might be helpful to a solution of the murder of your brother and sister, it's your duty to speak."

"Even if the thing were told me in confidence?" she persisted. "And the person were a member of my family?"

"Even under those conditions, I think." Markham spoke paternally. "Two terrible crimes have been committed, and nothing should be held back that might bring the murderer to justice—whoever he may be."

The girl averted her troubled face for a moment. Then she lifted her head with sudden resolution.

"I'll tell you. . . . You know you asked Rex about the shot in my room, and he told you he didn't hear it. Well, he confided in me, Mr. Markham; and he *did* hear the shot. But he was afraid to admit it lest you might think it funny he didn't get up and give the alarm."

"Why do you think he remained in bed silent, and pretended to every one he was asleep?" Markham attempted to suppress the keen interest the girl's information had roused in him.

"That's what I don't understand. He wouldn't

tell me. But he had some reason—I know he did! —some reason that terrified him. I begged him to tell me, but the only explanation he gave was that the shot was not all he heard. . . ."

"Not all!" Markham spoke with ill-concealed excitement. "He heard something else that, you say, terrified him? But why shouldn't he have told us about it?"

"That's the strange part of it. He got angry when I asked him. But there's something he knows —some awful secret; I feel sure of it. . . . Oh, maybe I shouldn't have told you. Maybe it will get Rex into trouble. But I felt that you ought to know because of the frightful things that have happened. I thought perhaps you could talk to Rex and make him tell you what's on his mind."

Again she looked beseechingly at Markham, and there was the anxiety of a vague fear in her eyes.

"Oh, I do wish you'd ask him—and try to find out," she went on, in a pleading tone. "I'd feel—safer if—if . . ."

Markham nodded and patted her hand.

"We'll try to make him talk."

"But don't try at the house," she said quickly. "There are people—things—around; and Rex would be too frightened. Ask him to come here, Mr. Markham. Get him away from that awful place, where he can talk without being afraid that some one's listening. Rex is home now. Ask him to come here. Tell him I'm here, too. Maybe I can help you reason with him. . . . Oh, do this for me, Mr. Markham!"

Markham glanced at the clock and ran his eye over his appointment-pad. He was, I knew, as anxious

as Ada to have Rex on the carpet for a questioning; and, after a momentary hesitation, he picked up the telephone-receiver and had Swacker put him through to the Greene mansion. From what I heard of the conversation that ensued, it was plain that he experienced considerable difficulty in urging Rex to come to the office, for he had to resort to a veiled threat of summary legal action before he finally succeeded.

"He evidently fears some trap," commented Markham thoughtfully, replacing the receiver. "But he has promised to get dressed immediately and come."

A look of relief passed over the girl's face.

"There's one other thing I ought to tell you," she said hurriedly; "though it may not mean anything. The other night, in the rear of the lower hall by the stairs, I picked up a piece of paper—like a leaf torn from a note-book. And there was a drawing on it of all our bedrooms up-stairs with four little crosses marked in ink—one at Julia's room, one at Chester's, one at Rex's, and one at mine. And down in the corner were several of the queerest signs, or pictures. One was a heart with three nails in it; and one looked like a parrot. Then there was a picture of what seemed to be three little stones with a line under them. . . ."

Heath suddenly jerked himself forward, his cigar half-way to his lips.

"A parrot, and three stones! . . . And say, Miss Greene, was there an arrow with numbers on it?"

"Yes!" she answered eagerly. "That was there, too."

Heath put his cigar in his mouth and chewed on it with vicious satisfaction.

"That means something, Mr. Markham," he proclaimed, trying to keep the agitation out of his voice. "Those are all symbols—graphic signs, they're called—of Continental crooks, German or Austrian mostly."

"The stones, I happen to know," put in Vance, "represent the idea of the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, who was stoned to death. They're the emblem of Saint Stephen, according to the calendar of the Styrian peasantry."

"I don't know anything about that, sir," answered Heath. "But I know that European crooks use those signs."

"Oh, doubtless. I ran across a number of 'em when I was looking up the emblematic language of the gypsies. A fascinatin' study." Vance seemed uninterested in Ada's discovery.

"Have you this paper with you, Miss Greene?" asked Markham.

The girl was embarrassed and shook her head.

"I'm so sorry," she apologized. "I didn't think it was important. Should I have brought it?"

"Did you destroy it?" Heath put the question excitedly.

"Oh, I have it safely. I put it away. . . ."

"We gotta have that paper, Mr. Markham." The Sergeant had risen and come toward the District Attorney's desk. "It may be just the lead we're looking for."

"If you really want it so badly," said Ada, "I can phone Rex to bring it with him. He'll know where to find it if I explain."

"Right! That'll save me a trip." Heath nodded

to Markham. "Try to catch him before he leaves, sir."

Taking up the telephone, Markham again directed Swacker to get Rex on the wire. After a brief delay the connection was made and he handed the instrument to Ada.

"Hello, Rex dear," she said. "Don't scold me, for there's nothing to worry about. . . . What I wanted of you is this:—in our private mail-box you'll find a sealed envelope of my personal blue stationery. Please get it and bring it with you to Mr. Markham's office. And don't let any one see you take it. . . . That's all, Rex. Now, hurry, and we'll have lunch together down-town."

"It will be at least half an hour before Mr. Greene can get here," said Markham, turning to Vance; "and as I've a waiting-room full of people, why don't you and Van Dine take the young lady to the Stock Exchange and show her how the mad brokers disport themselves.—How would you like that, Miss Greene?"

"I'd love it!" exclaimed the girl.

"Why not go along too, Sergeant?"

"Me!" Heath snorted. "I got excitement enough. I'll run over and talk to the Colonel* for a while."

Vance and Ada and I motored the few blocks to 18 Broad Street, and, taking the elevator, passed through the reception-room (where uniformed attendants peremptorily relieved us of our wraps), and came out upon the visitors' gallery overlooking the

* Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, one of the Department's greatest authorities on extradition, was then the commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office, with quarters in the Criminal Courts Building.

floor of the Exchange. There was an unusually active market that day. The pandemonium was almost deafening, and the feverish activity about the trading-posts resembled the riots of an excited mob. I was too familiar with the sight to be particularly impressed; and Vance, who detested noise and disorder, looked on with an air of bored annoyance. But Ada's face lighted up at once. Her eyes sparkled and the blood rushed to her cheeks. She gazed over the railing in a thrall of fascination.

"And now you see, Miss Greene, how foolish men can be," said Vance.

"Oh, but it's wonderful!" she answered. "They're alive. They feel things. They have something to fight for."

"You think you'd like it?" smiled Vance.

"I'd adore it. I've always longed to do something exciting—something . . . like that. . . ." She extended her hand toward the milling crowds below.

It was easy to understand her reaction after her years of monotonous service to an invalid in the dreary Greene mansion.

At that moment I happened to look up, and, to my surprise, Heath was standing in the doorway scanning the groups of visitors. He appeared troubled and unusually grim, and there was a nervous intentness in the way he moved his head. I raised my hand to attract his attention, and he immediately came to where we stood.

"The Chief wants you at the office right away, Mr. Vance." There was an ominousness in his tone. "He sent me over to get you."

Ada looked at him steadily, and a pallor of fear overspread her face.

"Well, well!" Vance shrugged in mock resignation. "Just when we were getting interested in the sights. But we must obey the Chief—eh, what, Miss Greene?"

But, despite his attempt to make light of Markham's unexpected summons, Ada was strangely silent; and as we rode back to the office she did not speak but sat tensely, her unseeing eyes staring straight ahead.

It seemed an interminable time before we reached the Criminal Courts Building. The traffic was congested; and there was even a long delay at the elevator. Vance appeared to take the situation calmly; but Heath's lips were compressed, and he breathed heavily through his nose, like a man laboring under tense excitement.

As we entered the District Attorney's office Markham rose and looked at the girl with a great tenderness.

"You must be brave, Miss Greene," he said, in a quiet, sympathetic voice. "Something tragic and unforeseen has happened. And as you will have to be told of it sooner or later——"

"It's Rex!" She sank limply into a chair facing Markham's desk.

"Yes," he said softly; "it's Rex. Sproot called up a few minutes after you had gone. . . ."

"And he's been shot—like Julia and Chester!" Her words were scarcely audible, but they brought a sense of horror into the dingy old office.

Markham inclined his head.

"Not five minutes after you telephoned to him some one entered his room and shot him."

A dry sob shook the girl, and she buried her face in her arms.

Markham stepped round the desk and placed his hand gently on her shoulder.

"We've got to face it, my child," he said. "We're going to the house at once to see what can be done· and you'd better come in the car with us."

"Oh, I don't want to go back," she moaned. "I'm afraid—*I'm afraid!* . . ."

CHAPTER XIV

FOOTPRINTS ON THE CARPET

(Tuesday, November 30; noon)

Markham had considerable difficulty in persuading Ada to accompany us. The girl seemed almost in a panic of fright. Moreover, she held herself indirectly responsible for Rex's death. But at last she permitted us to lead her down to the car.

Heath had already telephoned to the Homicide Bureau, and his arrangements for the investigation were complete when we started up Centre Street. At Police Headquarters Snitkin and another Central Office man named Burke were waiting for us, and crowded into the tonneau of Markham's car. We made excellent time to the Greene mansion, arriving there in less than twenty minutes.

A plain-clothes man lounged against the iron railing at the end of the street a few yards beyond the gate of the Greene grounds, and at a sign from Heath came forward at once.

"What about it, Santos?" the Sergeant demanded gruffly. "Who's been in and out of here this morning?"

"What's the big idea?" the man retorted indignantly. "That old bimbo of a butler came out about nine and returned in less than half an hour with a package. Said he'd been to Third Avenue to get some dog-biscuits. The family sawbones drove up at

quarter past ten—that's his car across the street." He pointed to Von Blon's Daimler, which was parked diagonally opposite. "He's still inside.—Then, about ten minutes after the doc arrived, this young lady"—he indicated Ada—"came out and walked toward Avenue A, where she hopped a taxi. And that's every man, woman, or child that's passed in or out of these gates since I relieved Cameron at eight o'clock this morning."

"And Cameron's report?"

"Nobody all night."

"Well, some one got in some way," growled Heath. "Run along the west wall there and tell Donnelly to come here *pronto*."

Santos disappeared through the gate, and a moment later we could see him hurrying through the side yard toward the garage. In a few minutes Donnelly—the man set to watch the postern gate—came hurrying up.

"Who got in the back way this morning?" barked Heath.

"Nobody, Sergeant. The cook went marketing about ten o'clock, and two regular deliverymen left packages. That's every one who's been through the rear gate since yesterday."

"Is that so!" Heath was viciously sarcastic.

"I'm telling you——"

"Oh, all right, all right." The Sergeant turned to Burke. "You get up on this wall and make the rounds. See if you can find where any one has climbed over.—And you, Snitkin, look over the yard for footprints. When you guys finish, report to me. I'm going inside."

We went up the front walk, which had been swept clean, and Sproot admitted us to the house. His face was as blank as ever, and he took our coats with his usual obsequious formality.

"You'd better go to your room now, Miss Greene," said Markham, placing his hand kindly on Ada's arm. "Lie down, and try to get a little rest. You look tired. I'll be in to see you before I go."

The girl obeyed submissively without a word.

"And you, Sproot," he ordered; "come in the living-room."

The old butler followed us and stood humbly before the centre-table, where Markham seated himself.

"Now, let's hear your story."

Sproot cleared his throat and stared out of the window.

"There's very little to tell, sir. I was in the butler's pantry, polishing the glassware, when I heard the shot——"

"Go back a little further," interrupted Markham. "I understand you made a trip to Third Avenue at nine this morning."

"Yes, sir. Miss Sibella bought a Pomeranian yesterday, and she asked me to get some dog-biscuits after breakfast."

"Who called at the house this morning?"

"No one, sir—that is, no one but Doctor Von Blon."

"All right. Now tell us everything that happened."

"Nothing happened, sir—nothing unusual, that is—until poor Mr. Rex was shot. Miss Ada went out a few minutes after Doctor Von Blon arrived; and a

little past eleven o'clock you telephoned to Mr. Rex. Then shortly afterward you telephoned a second time to Mr. Rex; and I returned to the pantry. I had only been there a few minutes when I heard the shot——"

"What time would you say that was?"

"About twenty minutes after eleven, sir."

"Then what?"

"I dried my hands on my apron and stepped into the dining-room to listen. I was not quite sure that the shot had been fired inside the house, but I thought I'd better investigate. So I went up-stairs and, as Mr. Rex's door was open, I looked in his room first. There I saw the poor young man lying on the floor with the blood running from a small wound in his forehead. I called Doctor Von Blon——"

"Where was the doctor?" Vance put the question.

Sproot hesitated, and appeared to think.

"He was up-stairs, sir; and he came at once——"

"Oh—up-stairs! Roaming about vaguely, I presume—a little here, a little there, what?" Vance's eyes bored into the butler. "Come, come, Sproot. Where was the doctor?"

"I think, sir, he was in Miss Sibella's room."

"*Cogito, cogito.* . . . Well, drum your encephalon a bit and try to reach a conclusion. From what sector of space did the corporeal body of Doctor Von Blon emerge after you had called him?"

"The fact is, sir, he came out of Miss Sibella's door."

"Well, well. Fancy that! And, such being the case, one might conclude—without too great a curfuffling of one's brains—that, preceding his issuing

from that particular door, he was actually in Miss Sibella's room?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Dash it all, Sproot! You know deuced well he was there."

"Well—yes, sir."

"And now suppose you continue with your odyssey."

"It was more like the Iliad, if I may say so. More tragic-like, if you understand what I mean; although Mr. Rex was not exactly a Hector. However that may be, sir, Doctor Von Blon came immediately——"

"He had not heard the shot, then?"

"Apparently not, for he seemed very much startled when he saw Mr. Rex. And Miss Sibella, who followed him into Mr. Rex's room, was startled, too."

"Did they make any comment?"

"As to that I couldn't say. I came down-stairs at once and telephoned to Mr. Markham."

As he spoke Ada appeared at the archway, her eyes wide.

"Some one's been in my room," she announced, in a frightened voice. "The French doors to the balcony were partly open when I went up-stairs just now, and there were dirty snow-tracks across the floor. . . . Oh, what does it mean? Do you think——?"

Markham had jerked himself forward.

"You left the French doors shut when you went out?"

"Yes—of course," she answered. "I rarely open them in winter."

"And were they locked?"

"I'm not sure, but I think so. They must have been locked—though how could any one have got in unless I'd forgotten to turn the key?"

Heath had risen and stood listening to the girl's story with grim bewilderment.

"Probably the bird with those galoshes again," he mumbled. "I'll get Jerym himself up here this time."

Markham nodded and turned back to Ada.

"Thank you for telling us, Miss Greene. Suppose you go to some other room and wait for us. We want your room left just as you found it until we've had time to examine it."

"I'll go to the kitchen and stay with cook. I—I don't want to be alone." And with a catch of her breath she left us.

"Where's Doctor Von Blon now?" Markham asked Sproot.

"With Mrs. Greene, sir."

"Tell him we're here and would like to see him at once."

The butler bowed and went out.

Vance was pacing up and down, his eyes almost closed.

"It grows madder every minute," he said. "It was insane enough without those foot-tracks and that open door. There's something devilish going on here, Markham. There's demonology and witchcraft afoot, or something strangely close to it. I say, is there anything in the Pandects or the Justinian Code relating to the proper legal procedure against diabolic possession or spiritism?"

Before Markham could rebuke him Von Blon entered. His usual suavity had disappeared. He

bowed jerkily without speaking, and smoothed his moustache nervously with an unsteady hand.

"Sproot tells me, doctor," said Markham, "that you did not hear the shot fired in Rex's room."

"No!" The fact seemed both to puzzle and disturb him. "I can't make it out either, for Rex's door into the hall was open."

"You were in Miss Sibella's room, were you not?" Vance had halted, and stood studying the doctor.

Von Blon lifted his eyebrows.

"I was. Sibella had been complaining about——"

"A sore throat or something of the kind, no doubt," finished Vance. "But that's immaterial. The fact is that neither you nor Miss Sibella heard the shot. Is that correct?"

The doctor inclined his head. "I knew nothing of it till Sproot knocked on the door and beckoned me across the hall."

"And Miss Sibella accompanied you into Rex's room?"

"She came in just behind me, I believe. But I told her not to touch anything, and sent her immediately back to her room. When I came out into the hall again I heard Sproot phoning the District Attorney's office, and thought I'd better wait till the police arrived. After talking over the situation with Sibella I informed Mrs. Greene of the tragedy, and remained with her until Sproot told me of your arrival."

"You saw no one else up-stairs, or heard no suspicious noise?"

"No one—nothing. The house, in fact, was unusually quiet."

"Do you recall if Miss Ada's door was open?"

The doctor pondered a moment. "I don't recall —which means it was probably closed. Otherwise I would have noticed it."

"And how is Mrs. Greene this morning?" Vance's question, put negligently, sounded curiously irrelevant.

Von Blon gave a start.

"She seemed somewhat more comfortable when I first saw her, but the news of Rex's death disturbed her considerably. When I left her just now she was complaining about the shooting pains in her spine."

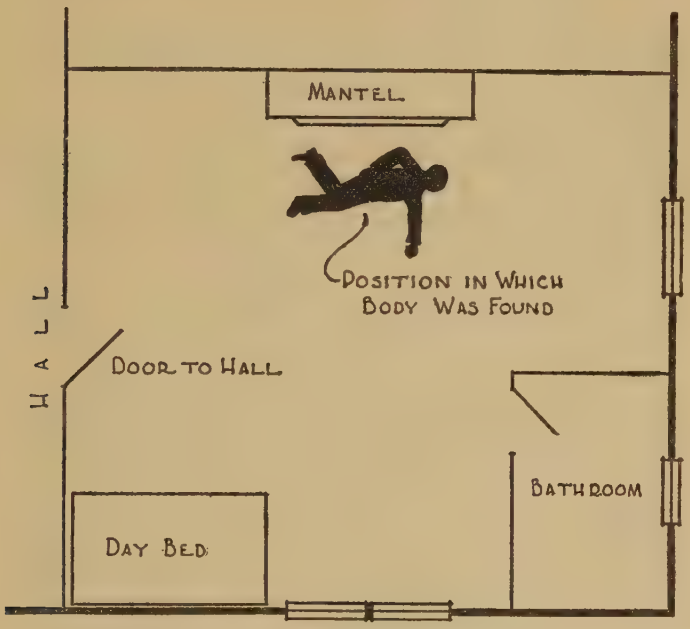
Markham had got up and now moved restlessly toward the archway.

"The Medical Examiner will be here any minute," he said; "and I want to look over Rex's room before he arrives. You might come with us, doctor.—And you, Sproot, had better remain at the front door."

We went up-stairs quietly: I think it was in all our minds that we should not advertise our presence to Mrs. Greene. Rex's room, like all those in the Greene mansion, was spacious. It had a large window at the front and another at the side. There were no draperies to shut out the light, and the slanting mid-day sun of winter poured in. The walls, as Chester had once told us, were lined with books; and pamphlets and papers were piled in every available nook. The chamber resembled a student's workshop more than a bedroom.

In front of the Tudor fireplace in the centre of the left wall—a duplication of the fireplace in Ada's room—sprawled the body of Rex Greene. His left arm was extended, but his right arm was crooked,

and the fingers were tightened, as if holding some object. His domelike head was turned a little to one side; and a thin stream of blood ran down his temple to the floor from a tiny aperture over the right eye.



REX'S BEDROOM.

Heath studied the body for several minutes.

"He was shot standing still, Mr. Markham. He collapsed in a heap and then straightened out a little after he'd hit the floor."

Vance was bending over the dead man with a puzzled expression.

"Markham, there's something curious and inconsistent here," he said. "It was broad daylight when this thing happened, and the lad was shot from the front—there are even powder marks on the face. But his expression is perfectly natural. No sign of fear or astonishment—rather peaceful and unconcerned, in fact. . . . It's incredible. The murderer and the pistol certainly weren't invisible."

Heath nodded slowly.

"I noticed that too, sir. It's damn peculiar." He bent more closely over the body. "That wound looks to me like a thirty-two," he commented, turning to the doctor for confirmation.

"Yes," said Von Blon. "It appears to have been made with the same weapon that was used against the others."

"It was the same weapon," Vance pronounced sombrely, taking out his cigarette-case with thoughtful deliberation. "And it was the same killer who used it." He smoked a moment, his troubled gaze resting on Rex's face. "But why was it done at just this time—in the daylight, with the door open, and when there were people close at hand? Why didn't the murderer wait until night? Why did he run such a needless risk?"

"Don't forget," Markham reminded him, "that Rex was on the point of coming to my office to tell me something."

"But who knew he was about to indulge in revelations? He was shot within ten minutes of your call——" He broke off and turned quickly to the doctor. "What telephone extensions are there in the house?"

"There are three, I believe." Von Blon spoke easily. "There's one in Mrs. Greene's room, one in Sibella's room, and, I think, one in the kitchen. The main phone is, of course, in the lower front hall."

"A regular central office," growled Heath. "Almost anybody coulda listened in." Suddenly he fell on his knees beside the body and unflexed the fingers of the right hand.

"I'm afraid you won't find that cryptic drawing, Sergeant," murmured Vance. "If the murderer shot Rex in order to seal his mouth the paper will surely be gone. Any one overhearing the phone calls, d'ye see, would have learned of the envelope he was to fetch along."

"I guess you're right, sir. But I'm going to have a look."

He felt under the body and then systematically went through the dead man's pockets. But he found nothing even resembling the blue envelope mentioned by Ada. At last he rose to his feet.

"It's gone, all right."

Then another idea occurred to him. Going hurriedly into the hall, he called down the stairs to Sproot. When the butler appeared Heath swung on him savagely.

"Where's the private mail-box?"

"I don't know that I exactly understand you." Sproot's answer was placid and unruffled. "There is a mail-box just outside the front door. Do you refer to that, sir?"

"No! You know damn well I don't. I want to know where the private—get me?—*private* mail-box is, *in the house*."

"Perhaps you are referring to the little silver pyx for outgoing mail on the table in the lower hall."

"'Pyx,' is it!" The Sergeant's sarcasm was stupendous. "Well, go down and bring me everything that's in this here pyx.—No! Wait a minute—I'll keep you company. . . . *Pyx!*" He took Sproot by the arm and fairly dragged him from the room.

A few moments later he returned, crestfallen.

"Empty!" was his laconic announcement.

"But don't give up hope entirely just because your cabalistic diagram has disappeared," Vance exhorted him. "I doubt if it would have helped you much. This case isn't a rebus. It's a complex mathematical formula, filled with moduli, infinitesimals, quantics, faciends, derivatives, and coefficients. Rex himself might have solved it if he hadn't been shoved off the earth so soon." His eyes wandered over the room. "And I'm not at all sure he hadn't solved it."

Markham was growing impatient.

"We'd better go down to the drawing-room and wait for Doctor Doremus and the men from Headquarters," he suggested. "We can't learn anything here."

We went out into the hall, and as we passed Ada's door Heath threw it open and stood on the threshold surveying the room. The French doors leading to the balcony were slightly ajar, and the wind from the west was flapping their green chintz curtains. On the light beige rug were several damp discolored tracks leading round the foot of the bed to the hall-door where we stood. Heath studied the marks for a moment, and then drew the door shut again.

"They're footprints, all right," he remarked.

"Some one tracked in the dirty snow from the balcony and forgot to shut the glass doors."

We were scarcely seated in the drawing-room when there came a knocking on the front door; and Sproot admitted Snitkin and Burke.

"You first, Burke," ordered the Sergeant, as the two officers appeared. "Any signs of an entry over the wall?"

"Not a one." The man's overcoat and trousers were smudged from top to bottom. "I crawled all round the top of the wall, and I'm here to tell you that nobody left any traces anywheres. If any guy got over that wall, he vaulted."

"Fair enough.—And now you, Snitkin."

"*I* got news for you." The detective spoke with overt triumph. "Somebody's walked up those outside steps to the stone balcony on the west side of the house. And he walked up 'em this morning after the snowfall at nine o'clock, for the tracks are fresh. Furthermore, they're the same size as the ones we found last time on the front walk."

"Where do these new tracks come from?" Heath leaned forward eagerly.

"That's the hell of it, Sergeant. They come from the front walk right below the steps to the front door; and there's no tracing 'em farther back because the front walk's been swept clean."

"I mighta known it," grumbled Heath. "And the tracks are only going one way?"

"That's all. They leave the walk a few feet below the front door, swing round the corner of the house, and go up the steps to the balcony. The guy who made 'em didn't come down that way."

The Sergeant puffed disappointedly on his cigar.

"So he went up the balcony steps, entered the French doors, crossed Ada's room to the hall, did his dirty work, and then—disappeared! A sweet case this is!" He clicked his tongue with disgust.

"The man may have gone out by the front door," suggested Markham.

The Sergeant made a wry face and bellowed for Sproot, who entered immediately.

"Say, which way did you go up-stairs when you heard the shot?"

"I went up the servants' stairs, sir."

"Then some one mighta gone down the front stairs at the same time without your seeing him?"

"Yes, sir; it's quite possible."

"That's all."

Sproot bowed and again took up his post at the front door.

"Well, it looks like that's what happened, sir," Heath commented to Markham. "Only how did he get in and out of the grounds without being seen? That's what I want to know."

Vance was standing by the window gazing out upon the river.

"There's something dashed unconvincing about those recurrent spoors in the snow. Our eccentric culprit is altogether too careless with his feet and too careful with his hands. He doesn't leave a finger-print or any other sign of his presence except those foot-tracks—all nice and tidy and staring us in the face. But they don't square with the rest of this fantastic business."

Heath stared hopelessly at the floor. He was pat-

ently of Vance's opinion; but the dogged thoroughness of his nature asserted itself, and presently he looked up with a forced show of energy.

"Go and phone Captain Jerym, Snitkin, and tell him I wish he'd hustle out here to look at some carpet-tracks. Then make measurements of those footprints on the balcony steps.—And you, Burke, take up a post in the upper hall, and don't let any one go into the two front west rooms."

CHAPTER XV

THE MURDERER IN THE HOUSE

(Tuesday, November 30; 12.30 p. m.)

When Snitkin and Burke had gone Vance turned from the window and strolled to where the doctor was sitting.

"I think it might be well," he said quietly, "if the exact whereabouts of every one in the house preceding and during the shooting was determined.—We know, doctor, that you arrived here at about a quarter past ten. How long were you with Mrs. Greene?"

Von Blon drew himself up and gave Vance a resentful stare. But quickly his manner changed and he answered courteously:

"I sat with her for perhaps half an hour; then I went to Sibella's room—a little before eleven, I should say—and remained there until Sproot called me."

"And was Miss Sibella with you in the room all the time?"

"Yes—the entire time."

"Thank you."

Vance returned to the window, and Heath, who had been watching the doctor belligerently, took his cigar from his mouth and cocked his head at Markham.

"You know, sir, I was just thinking over the Inspector's suggestion about planting some one in the house to keep an eye on things. How would it be if

we got rid of this nurse that's here now, and put in one of our own women from Headquarters?"

Von Blon looked up with eager approval.

"An excellent plan!" he exclaimed.

"Very well, Sergeant," agreed Markham. "You attend to it."

"Your woman can begin to-night," Von Blon told Heath. "I'll meet you here whenever you say, and give her instructions. There's nothing very technical for her to do."

Heath made a notation in a battered note-book.

"I'll meet you here, say, at six o'clock. How's that?"

"That will suit me perfectly." Von Blon rose. "And now, if I can be of no more service . . ."

"That's quite all right, doctor," said Markham. "Go right ahead."

But instead of immediately leaving the house Von Blon went up-stairs, and we heard him knock on Sibella's door. A few minutes later he came down again and passed on to the front door without a glance in our direction.

In the meantime Snitkin had come in and informed the Sergeant that Captain Jerym was leaving Police Headquarters at once and would arrive within half an hour. He had then gone outside to make his measurements of the footprints on the balcony steps.

"And now," suggested Markham, "I think we might see Mrs. Greene. It's possible she heard something. . . ."

Vance roused himself from apparent lethargy.

"By all means. But first let us get a few facts in hand. I long to hear where the nurse was dur-

ing the half-hour preceding Rex's demise. And I could bear to know if the old lady was alone immediately following the firing of the revolver.—Why not have our Miss Nightingale on the tapis before we brave the invalid's imprecations?"

Markham concurred, and Heath sent Sproot to summon her.

The nurse came in with an air of professional detachment; but her roseate cheeks had paled perceptibly since we last saw her.

"Miss Craven"—Vance's manner was easy and businesslike—"will you please tell us exactly what you were doing between half past ten and half past eleven this morning?"

"I was in my room on the third floor," she answered. "I went there when the doctor arrived a little after ten, and remained until he called me to bring Mrs. Greene's bouillon. Then I returned to my room and stayed until the doctor again summoned me to sit with Mrs. Greene while he was with you gentlemen."

"When you were in your room, was the door open?"

"Oh, yes. I always leave it open in the daytime in case Mrs. Greene calls."

"And her door was open, too, I take it."

"Yes."

"Did you hear the shot?"

"No, I didn't."

"That will be all, Miss Craven." Vance accompanied her to the hall. "You'd better return to your room now, for we're going to pay a visit to your patient."

Mrs. Greene eyed us vindictively when we entered after having knocked and been imperiously ordered to come in.

"More trouble," she complained. "Am I never to have any peace in my own house? The first day in weeks I've felt even moderately comfortable—and then all this had to happen to upset me!"

"We regret, madam—more than you do apparently—that your son is dead," said Markham. "And we are sorry for the annoyance the tragedy is causing you. But that does not relieve me from the necessity of investigating the affair. As you were awake at the time the shot was fired, it is essential that we seek what information you may be able to give us."

"What information can I give you—a helpless paralytic, lying here alone?" A smouldering anger flickered in her eyes. "It strikes me that you are the one to give *me* information."

Markham ignored her barbed retort.

"The nurse tells me your door was open this morning. . . ."

"And why shouldn't it have been? Am I expected to be entirely excommunicated from the rest of the household?"

"Certainly not. I was merely trying to find out if, by any chance, you were in a position to hear anything that went on in the hall."

"Well, I heard nothing—if that's all you want to know."

Markham persisted patiently.

"You heard no one, for instance, cross Miss Ada's room, or open Miss Ada's door?"

"I've already told you I heard nothing." The old lady's denial was viciously emphatic.

"Nor any one walking in the hall, or descending the stairs?"

"No one but that incompetent doctor and the impossible Sproot. Were we supposed to have had visitors this morning?"

"Some one shot your son," Markham reminded her coolly.

"It was probably his own fault," she snapped. Then she seemed to relent a bit. "Still, Rex was not as hard and thoughtless as the rest of the children. But even he neglected me shamefully." She appeared to weigh the matter. "Yes," she decided, "he received just punishment for the way he treated me."

Markham struggled with a hot resentment. At last he managed to ask, with apparent calmness:

"Did you hear the shot with which your son was punished?"

"I did not." Her tone was again irate. "I knew nothing of the disturbance until the doctor saw fit to tell me."

"And yet Mr. Rex's door, as well as yours, was open," said Markham. "I can hardly understand your not having heard the shot."

The old lady gave him a look of scathing irony.

"Am I to sympathize with your lack of understanding?"

"Lest you be tempted to, madam, I shall leave you." Markham bowed stiffly and turned on his heel.

As we reached the lower hall Doctor Doremus arrived.

"Your friends are still at it, I hear, Sergeant," he greeted Heath, with his usual breezy manner. Handing his coat and hat to Sproot, he came forward and shook hands with all of us. "When you fellows don't spoil my breakfast you interfere with my lunch," he repined. "Where's the body?"

Heath led him up-stairs, and after a few minutes returned to the drawing-room. Taking out another cigar he bit the end of it savagely. "Well, sir, I guess you'll want to see this Miss Sibella next, won't you?"

"We might as well," sighed Markham. "Then I'll tackle the servants and leave things to you. The reporters will be along pretty soon."

"Don't I know it! And what they're going to do to us in the papers'll be a-plenty!"

"And you can't even tell them 'it is confidently expected that an arrest will be made in the immediate future,' don't y' know," grinned Vance. "It's most distressin'."

Heath made an inarticulate noise of exasperation and, calling Sproot, sent him for Sibella.

A moment later she came in carrying a small Pomeranian. She was paler than I had ever seen her, and there was unmistakable fright in her eyes. When she greeted us it was without her habitual gaiety.

"This thing is getting rather ghastly, isn't it?" she remarked when she had taken a seat.

"It is indeed dreadful," returned Markham soberly. "You have our very deepest sympathy. . . ."

"Oh, thanks awf'ly." She accepted the cigarette Vance offered her. "But I'm beginning to wonder

how long I'll be here to receive condolences." She spoke with forced lightness, but a strained quality in her voice told of her suppressed emotion.

Markham regarded her sympathetically.

"I do not think it would be a bad idea if you went away for a while—to some friend's house, let us say—preferably out of the city."

"Oh, no." She tossed her head with defiance. "I sha'n't run away. If there's any one really bent on killing me, he'll manage it somehow, wherever I am. Anyway, I'd have to come back sooner or later. I couldn't board with out-of-town friends indefinitely—could I?" She looked at Markham with a kind of anxious despair. "You haven't any idea, I suppose, who it is that's obsessed with the idea of exterminating us Greenes?"

Markham was reluctant to admit to her the utter hopelessness of the official outlook; and she turned appealingly to Vance.

"You needn't treat me like a child," she said spiritedly. "You, at least, Mr. Vance, can tell me if there is any one under suspicion."

"No, dash it all, Miss Greene!—there isn't," he answered promptly. "It's an amazin' confession to have to make; but it's true. That's why, I think, Mr. Markham suggested that you go away for a while."

"It's very thoughtful of him and all that," she returned. "But I think I'll stay and see it through."

"You're a very brave girl," said Markham, with troubled admiration. "And I assure you everything humanly possible will be done to safeguard you."

"Well, so much for that." She tossed her ciga-

rette into a receiver, and began abstractedly to pet the dog in her lap. "And now, I suppose, you want to know if I heard the shot. Well, I didn't. So you may continue the inquisition from that point."

"You were in your room, though, at the time of your brother's death?"

"I was in my room all morning," she said. "My first appearance beyond the threshold was when Sproot brought the sad tidings of Rex's passing. But Doctor Von shooed me back again; and there I've remained until now. Model behavior, don't you think, for a member of this new and wicked generation?"

"What time did Doctor Von Blon come to your room?" asked Vance.

Sibella gave him a faint whimsical smile.

"I'm so glad it was you who asked that question. I'm sure Mr. Markham would have used a disapproving tone—though it's quite *au fait* to receive one's doctor in one's boudoir.—Let me see. I'm sure you asked Doctor Von the same question, so I must be careful. . . . A little before eleven, I should say."

"The doc's exact words," chimed in Heath suspiciously.

Sibella turned a look of amused surprise upon him.

"Isn't that wonderful! But then, I've always been told that honesty is the best policy."

"And did Doctor Von Blon remain in your room until called by Sproot?" pursued Vance.

"Oh, yes. He was smoking his pipe. Mother detests pipes, and he often sneaks into my room to enjoy a quiet smoke."

"And what were you doing during the doctor's visit?"

"I was bathing this ferocious animal." She held up the Pomeranian for Vance's inspection. "Doesn't he look nice?"

"In the bathroom?"

"Naturally. I'd hardly bathe him in the *poudrière*."

"And was the bathroom door closed?"

"As to that I couldn't say. But it's quite likely. Doctor Von is like a member of the family, and I'm terribly rude to him sometimes."

Vance got up.

"Thank you very much, Miss Greene. We're sorry we had to trouble you. Do you mind remaining in your room for a while?"

"Mind? On the contrary. It's about the only place I feel safe." She walked to the archway. "If you do find out anything you'll let me know—won't you? There's no use pretending any longer. I'm dreadfully scared." Then, as if ashamed of her admission, she went quickly down the hall.

Just then Sproot admitted the two finger-print experts—Dubois and Bellamy—and the official photographer. Heath joined them in the hall and took them up-stairs, returning immediately.

"And now what, sir?"

Markham seemed lost in gloomy speculation, and it was Vance who answered the Sergeant's query.

"I rather think," he said, "that another verbal bout with the pious Hemming and the taciturn Frau Mannheim might dispose of a loose end or two."

Hemming was sent for. She came in laboring un-

der intense excitement. Her eyes fairly glittered with the triumph of the prophetess whose auguries have come to pass. But she had no information whatever to impart. She had spent most of the forenoon in the laundry, and had been unaware of the tragedy until Sproot had mentioned it to her shortly before our arrival. She was voluble, however, on the subject of divine punishment, and it was with difficulty that Vance stemmed her oracular stream of words.

Nor could the cook throw any light on Rex's murder. She had been in the kitchen, she said, the entire morning except for the hour she had gone marketing. She had not heard the shot and, like Hemming, knew of the tragedy only through Sproot. A marked change, however, had come over the woman. When she had entered the drawing-room fright and resentment animated her usually stolid features, and as she sat before us her fingers worked nervously in her lap.

Vance watched her critically during the interview. At the end he asked suddenly:

"Miss Ada has been with you in the kitchen this past half-hour?"

At the mention of Ada's name her fear was perceptibly intensified. She drew a deep breath.

"Yes, little Ada has been with me. And thank the good God she was away this morning when Mr. Rex was killed, or it might have been her and not Mr. Rex. They tried once to shoot her, and maybe they'll try again. She oughtn't to be allowed to stay in this house."

"I think it only fair to tell you, Frau Mannheim,"

said Vance, "that some one will be watching closely over Miss Ada from now on."

The woman looked at him gratefully.

"Why should any one want to harm little Ada?" she asked, in an anguished tone. "I also shall watch over her."

When she had left us Vance said:

"Something tells me, Markham, that Ada could have no better protector in this house than that motherly German.—And yet," he added, "there'll be no end of this grim carnage until we have the murderer safely gyved." His face darkened: his mouth was as cruel as Pietro de' Medici's. "This hellish business isn't ended. The final picture is only just emerging. And it's damnable—worse than any of the horrors of Rops or Doré."

Markham nodded with dismal depression.

"Yes, there appears to be an inevitability about these tragedies that's beyond mere human power to combat." He got up wearily and addressed himself to Heath. "There's nothing more I can do here at present, Sergeant. Carry on, and phone me at the office before five."

We were about to take our departure when Captain Jerym arrived. He was a quiet, heavy-set man, with a gray, scraggly moustache and small, deep-set eyes. One might easily have mistaken him for a shrewd, efficient merchant. After a brief hand-shaking ceremony Heath piloted him up-stairs.

Vance had already donned his ulster, but now he removed it.

"I think I'll tarry a bit and hear what the Captain has to say regarding those footprints. Y' know,

Markham, I've been evolving a rather fantastic theory about 'em; and I want to test it."

Markham looked at him a moment with questioning curiosity. Then he glanced at his watch.

"I'll wait with you," he said.

Ten minutes later Doctor Doremus came down, and paused long enough on his way out to tell us that Rex had been shot with a .32 revolver held at a distance of about a foot from the forehead, the bullet having entered directly from the front and embedded itself, in all probability, in the midbrain.

A quarter of an hour after Doremus had gone Heath re-entered the drawing-room. He expressed uneasy surprise at seeing us still there.

"Mr. Vance wanted to hear Jerym's report," Markham explained.

"The Captain'll be through any minute now." The Sergeant sank into a chair. "He's checking Snitkin's measurements. He couldn't make much of the tracks on the carpet, though."

"And finger-prints?" asked Markham.

"Nothing yet."

"And there won't be," added Vance. "There wouldn't be footprints if they weren't deliberately intended for us."

Heath shot him a sharp look, but before he could speak Captain Jerym and Snitkin came down-stairs.

"What's the verdict, Cap?" asked the Sergeant.

"Those footprints on the balcony steps," said Jerym, "were made with galoshes of the same size and markings as the pattern turned over to me by Snitkin a fortnight or so ago. As for the prints in the room, I'm not so sure. They appear to be the

same, however; and the dirt on them is sooty, like the dirt on the snow outside the French doors. I've several photographs of them; and I'll know definitely when I get my enlargements under the microscope."

Vance rose and sauntered to the archway.

"May I have your permission to go up-stairs a moment, Sergeant?"

Heath looked mystified. His instinct was to ask a reason for this unexpected request, but all he said was: "Sure. Go ahead."

Something in Vance's manner—an air of satisfaction combined with a suppressed eagerness—told me that he had verified his theory.

He was gone less than five minutes. When he returned he carried a pair of galoshes similar to those that had been found in Chester's closet. He handed them to Captain Jerym.

"You'll probably find that these made the tracks."

Both Jerym and Snitkin examined them carefully, comparing the measurements and fitting the rough patterns to the soles. Finally, the Captain took one of them to the window, and affixing a jeweller's glass to his eye, studied the riser of the heel.

"I think you're right," he agreed. "There's a worn place here which corresponds to an indentation on the cast I made."

Heath had sprung to his feet and stood eyeing Vance.

"Where did you find 'em?" he demanded.

"Tucked away in the rear of the little linen-closet at the head of the stairs."

The Sergeant's excitement got the better of him.

He swung about to Markham, fairly spluttering with consternation.

"Those two guys from the Bureau that went over this house looking for the gun told me there wasn't a pair of galoshes in the place; and I specially told 'em to keep their eyes pealed for galoshes. And now Mr. Vance finds 'em in the linen-closet off the main hall up-stairs!"

"But, Sergeant," said Vance mildly, "the galoshes weren't there when your sleuths were looking for the revolver. On both former occasions the johnny who wore 'em had plenty of time to put 'em away safely. But to-day, d' ye see, he had no chance to sequester them; so he left 'em in the linen-closet for the time being."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Heath growled vaguely. "Well, what's the rest of the story, Mr. Vance?"

"That's all there is to date. If I knew the rest I'd know who fired the shots. But I might remind you that neither of your *sergents-de-ville* saw any suspicious person leave here."

"Good God, Vance!" Markham was on his feet. "That means that the murderer is in the house this minute."

"At any rate," returned Vance lazily, "I think we are justified in assuming that the murderer was here when we arrived."

"But nobody's left the place but Von Blon," blurted Heath.

Vance nodded. "Oh, it's wholly possible the murderer is still in the house, Sergeant."

CHAPTER XVI

THE LOST POISONS

(Tuesday, November 30; 2 p. m.)

Markham and Vance and I had a late lunch at the Stuyvesant Club. During the meal the subject of the murder was avoided as if by tacit agreement; but when we sat smoking over our coffee Markham settled back in his chair and surveyed Vance sternly.

"Now," he said, "I want to hear how you came to find those galoshes in the linen-closet. And, damn it! I don't want any garrulous evasions or quotations out of Bartlett."

"I'm quite willing to unburden my soul," smiled Vance. "It was all so dashed simple. I never put any stock in the burglar theory, and so was able to approach the problem with a virgin mind, as it were."

He lit a fresh cigarette and poured himself another cup of coffee.

"Perpend, Markham. On the night that Julia and Ada were shot a double set of footprints was found. It had stopped snowing at about eleven o'clock, and the tracks had been made between that hour and midnight, when the Sergeant arrived on the scene. On the night of Chester's murder there was another set of footprints similar to the others; and they too had been made shortly after the weather had cleared. Here, then, were tracks in the snow, approaching and retreating from the front door,

preceding each crime; and both sets had been made after the snow had stopped falling *when they would be distinctly visible and determinable.* This was not a particularly striking coincidence, but it was sufficiently arresting to create a slight strain on my *cortex cerebri.* And the strain increased perceptibly this morning when Snitkin reported his discovery of fresh footprints on the balcony steps; for once again the same meteorological conditions had accompanied our culprit's passion for leaving spoors. I was therefore driven to the irresistible inference, as you learned Solons put it, that the murderer, so careful and calculating about everything else, had deliberately made all these footprints for our special edification. In each instance, d' ye see, he had chosen the only hour of the day when his tracks would not be obliterated by falling snow or confused with other tracks. . . . Are you there?"

"Go ahead," said Markham. "I'm listening."

"To proceed, then. Another coincidence attached to these three sets of footprints. It was impossible, because of the dry, flaky nature of the snow, to determine whether the first set had originated in the house and returned there, or had first approached the house from the street and then retreated. Again, on the night of Chester's demise, when the snow was damp and susceptible to clear impressions, the same doubt arose. The tracks to and from the house were on opposite sides of the front walk: not a single footstep overlapped! Accidental? Perhaps. But not wholly reasonable. A person walking to and from a door along a comparatively narrow pathway would almost certainly have doubled on some of his

tracks. And even if he had failed to superimpose any of his footprints, the parallel spoors would have been close together. But these two lines of prints were far apart: each clung to the extreme edge of the walk, as if the person who made them was positively afraid of overlapping. Now, consider the footprints made this morning. There was a single line of them entering the house, but none coming out. We concluded that the murderer had made his escape *via* the front door and down the neatly swept walk; but this, after all, was only an assumption."

Vance sipped his coffee and inhaled a moment on his cigarette.

"The point I'm trying to bring out is this: there is no proof whatever that all these footprints were not made by some one in the house who first went out and then returned for the express purpose of leading the police to believe that an outsider was guilty. And, on the other hand, there is evidence that the footprints actually did originate in the house; because if an outsider had made them he would have been at no pains to confuse the issue of their origin, since, in any event, they could not have been traced back farther than the street. Therefore, as a tentative starting-point, I assumed that the tracks had, in reality, been made by some one in the house.—I can't say, of course, whether or not my layman's logic adds lustre to the gladsome light of jurisprudence——"

"Your reasoning is consistent as far as it goes," cut in Markham tartly. "But it is hardly complete enough to have led you directly to the linen-closet this morning."

"True. But there were various contribut'ry fac-

tors. For instance, the galoshes which Snitkin found in Chester's clothes-closet were the exact size of the prints. At first I toyed with the idea that they were the actual instruments of our unknown's vestigial deception. But when, after they had been taken to Headquarters, another set of similar tracks appeared —to wit, the ones found this morning—I amended my theory slightly, and concluded that Chester had owned two pairs of galoshes—one that had perhaps been discarded but not thrown away. That was why I wanted to wait for Captain Jerym's report: I was anxious to learn if the new tracks were exactly like the old ones."

"But even so," interrupted Markham, "your theory that the footprints emanated from the house strikes me as being erected on pretty weak scaffolding. Were there any other indicants?"

"I was coming to them," replied Vance reproachfully. "But you *will* rush me so. Pretend that I'm a lawyer, and my summation will sound positively breathless."

"I'm more likely to pretend that I'm a presiding judge, and give you *sus. per coll.*"

"Ah, well." Vance sighed and continued. "Let us consider the hypothetical intruder's means of escape after the shooting of Julia and Ada. Sproot came into the upper hall immediately after the shot had been fired in Ada's room; yet he heard nothing —neither footsteps in the hall nor the front door closing. And, Markham old thing, a person in galoshes going down marble steps in the dark is no midsummer zephyr for silence. In the circumstances Sproot would have been certain to hear him making his escape. Therefore, the explanation that sug-

gested itself to me was that *he did not make his escape.*"

"And the footprints outside?"

"Were made beforehand by some one walking to the front gate and back.—And that brings me to the night of Chester's murder. You remember Rex's tale of hearing a dragging noise in the hall and a door closing about fifteen minutes before the shot was fired, and Ada's corroboration of the door-shutting part of the story? The noise, please note, was heard after it had stopped snowing—in fact, after the moon had come out. Could the noise not easily have been a person walking in galoshes, or even taking them off, after having returned from making those separated tracks to and from the gate? And might not that closing door have been the door of the linen-closet where the galoshes were being temporarily cached?"

Markham nodded. "Yes, the sounds Rex and Ada heard might be explained that way."

"And this morning's business was even plainer. There were footprints on the balcony steps, made between nine o'clock and noon. But neither of the guards saw any one enter the grounds. Moreover, Sproot waited a few moments in the dining-room after the shot had been fired in Rex's room; and if any one had come down the stairs and gone out the front door Sproot would certainly have heard him. It's true that the murderer might have descended the front stairs as Sproot went up the servants' stairs. But is that likely? Would he have waited in the upper hall after killing Rex, knowing that some one was likely to step out and discover him? I think not. And anyway, the guards saw no one leave the estate.

Ergo, I concluded that *no one came down the front stairs after Rex's death.* I assumed again that the footprints had been made at some earlier hour. This time, however, the murderer did not go to the gate and return, for a guard was there who would have seen him; and, furthermore, the front steps and the walk had been swept. So our track-maker, after having donned the galoshes, stepped out of the front door, walked round the corner of the house, mounted the balcony steps, and re-entered the upper hall by way of Ada's room."

"I see." Markham leaned over and knocked the ashes from his cigar. "Therefore, you inferred that the galoshes were still in the house."

"Exactly. But I'll admit I didn't think of the linen-closet at once. First I tried Chester's room. Then I took a look round Julia's chamber; and I was about to go up to the servants' quarters when I recalled Rex's story of the closing door. I ran my eye over all the second-story doors, and straightway tried the linen-closet—which was, after all, the most likely place for a transient occultation. And lo! there were the galoshes tucked under an old drugget. The murderer had probably hidden them there both times before, pending an opportunity of secreting them more thoroughly."

"But where could they have been concealed so that our searchers didn't run across them?"

"As to that, now, I couldn't say. They may have been taken out of the house altogether."

There was a silence for several minutes. Then Markham spoke.

"The finding of the galoshes pretty well proves your theory, Vance. But do you realize what con-

fronts us now? If your reasoning is correct, the guilty person is some one with whom we've been talking this morning. It's an appalling thought. I've gone over in my mind every member of that household; and I simply can't regard any one of them as a potential mass-murderer."

"Sheer moral prejudice, old dear." Vance's voice assumed a note of raillery. "I'm a bit cynical myself, and the only person at the Greene mansion I'd eliminate as a possibility would be Frau Mannheim. She's not sufficiently imaginative to have planned this accumulative massacre. But as regards the others, I could picture any one of 'em as being at the bottom of this diabolical slaughter. It's a mistaken idea, don't y' know, to imagine that a murderer looks like a murderer. No murderer ever does. The only people who really look like murderers are quite harmless. Do you recall the mild and handsome features of the Reverend Richeson of Cambridge? Yet he gave his inamorata cyanide of potassium. The fact that Major Armstrong was a meek and gentlemanly looking chap did not deter him from feeding arsenic to his wife. Professor Webster of Harvard was not a criminal type; but the dismembered spirit of Doctor Parkman doubtless regards him as a brutal slayer. Doctor Lamson, with his philanthropic eyes and his benevolent beard, was highly regarded as a humanitarian; but he administered aconitine rather cold-bloodedly to his crippled brother-in-law. Then there was Doctor Neil Cream, who might easily have been mistaken for the deacon of a fashionable church; and the soft-spoken and amiable Doctor Waite. . . . And the women! Edith Thompson admitted putting powdered glass in her husband's

gruel, though she looked like a pious Sunday-school teacher. Madeleine Smith certainly had a most respectable countenance. And Constance Kent was rather a beauty—a nice girl with an engaging air; yet she cut her little brother's throat in a thoroughly brutal manner. Gabrielle Bompard and Marie Boyer were anything but typical of the *donna delinquente;* but the one strangled her lover with the cord of her dressing-gown, and the other killed her mother with a cheese-knife. And what of Madame Fenayrou——?"

"Enough!" protested Markham. "Your lecture on criminal physiognomy can go over a while. Just now I'm trying to adjust my mind to the staggering inferences to be drawn from your finding of those galoshes." A sense of horror seemed to weigh him down. "Good God, Vance! There must be some way out of this nightmare you've propounded. What member of that household could possibly have walked in on Rex Greene and shot him down in broad daylight?"

" 'Pon my soul, I don't know." Vance himself was deeply affected by the sinister aspects of the case. "But some one in that house did it—some one the others don't suspect."

"That look on Julia's face, and Chester's amazed expression—that's what you mean, isn't it? They didn't suspect either. And they were horrified at the revelation—when it was too late. Yes, all those things fit in with your theory."

"But there's one thing that doesn't fit, old man." Vance gazed at the table perplexedly. "Rex died peacefully, apparently unaware of his murderer. Why wasn't there also a look of horror on his face?

His eyes couldn't have been shut when the revolver was levelled at him, for he was standing, facing the intruder. It's inexplicable—mad!"

He beat a nervous tattoo on the table, his brows contracted.

"And there's another thing, Markham, that's incomprehensible about Rex's death. His door into the hall was open; but nobody up-stairs heard the shot—nobody *up-stairs*. And yet Sproot—who was down-stairs, in the butler's pantry behind the dining-room—heard it distinctly."

"It probably just happened that way," Markham argued, almost automatically. "Sound acts fantastically sometimes."

Vance shook his head.

"Nothing has 'just happened' in this case. There's a terrible logic about everything—a carefully planned reason behind each detail. Nothing has been left to chance. Still, this very systematization of the crime will eventually prove the murderer's downfall. When we can find a key to any one of the anterooms, we'll know our way into the main chamber of horrors."

At that moment Markham was summoned to the telephone. When he returned his expression was puzzled and uneasy.

"It was Swacker. Von Blon is at my office now—he has something to tell me."

"Ah! Very interestin'," commented Vance.

We drove to the District Attorney's office, and Von Blon was shown in at once.

"I may be stirring up a mare's nest," he began apologetically, after he had seated himself on the edge of a chair. "But I felt I ought to inform you

of a curious thing that happened to me this morning. At first I thought I would tell the police, but it occurred to me they might misunderstand; and I decided to place the matter before you to act upon as you saw fit."

Plainly he was uncertain as to how the subject should be broached, and Markham waited patiently with an air of polite indulgence.

"I phoned the Greene house as soon as I made the —ah—discovery," Von Blon went on hesitantly. "But I was informed you had left for the office; so, as soon as I had lunched, I came directly here."

"Very good of you, doctor," murmured Markham.

Again Von Blon hesitated, and his manner became exaggeratedly ingratiating.

"The fact is, Mr. Markham, I am in the habit of carrying a rather full supply of emergency drugs in my medicine-case. . . ."

"Emergency drugs?"

"Strychnine, morphine, caffeine, and a variety of hypnotics and stimulants. I find it often convenient——"

"And it was in connection with these drugs you wished to see me?"

"Indirectly—yes." Von Blon paused momentarily to arrange his words. "To-day it happened that I had in my case a fresh tube of soluble quarter-grain morphine tablets, and a Parke-Davis carton of four tubes of strychnine—thirtieths. . . ."

"And what about this supply of drugs, doctor?"

"The fact is, the morphine and the strychnine have disappeared."

Markham bent forward, his eyes curiously animated.

"They were in my case this morning when I left my office," Von Blon explained; "and I made only two brief calls before I went to the Greenes'. I missed the tubes when I returned to my office."

Markham studied the doctor a moment.

"And you think it improbable that the drugs were taken from your case during either of your other calls?"

"That's just it. At neither place was the case out of my sight for a moment."

"And at the Greenes'?" Markham's agitation was growing rapidly.

"I went directly to Mrs. Greene's room, taking the case with me. I remained there for perhaps half an hour. When I came out——"

"You did not leave the room during that half-hour?"

"No. . . ."

"Pardon me, doctor," came Vance's indolent voice; "but the nurse mentioned that you called to her to bring Mrs. Greene's bouillon. From where did you call?"

Von Blon nodded. "Ah, yes. I did speak to Miss Craven. I stepped to the door and called up the servants' stairs."

"Quite so. And then?"

"I waited with Mrs. Greene until the nurse came. Then I went across the hall to Sibella's room."

"And your case?" interjected Markham.

"I set it down in the hall, against the rear railing of the main stairway."

"And you remained in Miss Sibella's room until Sproot called you?"

"That is right."

"Then the case was unguarded in the rear of the upper hall from about eleven until you left the house?"

"Yes. After I had taken leave of you gentlemen in the drawing-room I went up-stairs and got it."

"And also made your adieus to Miss Sibella," added Vance.

Von Blon raised his eyebrows with an air of gentle surprise.

"Naturally."

"What amount of these drugs disappeared?" asked Markham.

"The four tubes of strychnine contained in all approximately three grains—three and one-third, to be exact. And there are twenty-five tablets of morphine in a Parke-Davis tube, making six and one-quarter grains."

"Are those fatal doses, doctor?"

"That's a difficult question to answer, sir." Von Blon adopted a professorial manner. "One may have a tolerance for morphine and be capable of assimilating astonishingly large doses. But, *ceteris paribus*, six grains would certainly prove fatal. Regarding strychnine, toxicology gives us a very wide range as to lethal dosage, depending on the condition and age of the patient. The average fatal dose for an adult is, I should say, two grains, though death has resulted from administrations of one grain, or even less. And, on the other hand, recovery has taken place after as much as ten grains have been swallowed. Generally speaking, however, three and one-third grains would be sufficient to produce fatal results."

When Von Blon had gone Markham gazed at Vance anxiously.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"I don't like it—I don't at all like it." Vance shook his head despairingly. "It's dashed queer—the whole thing. And the doctor is worried, too. There's a panic raging beneath his elegant façade. He's in a blue funk—and it's not because of the loss of his pills. He fears something, Markham. There was a strained, hunted look in his eyes."

"Doesn't it strike you as strange that he should be carrying such quantities of drugs about with him?"

"Not necessarily. Some doctors do it. The Continental M.D.s especially are addicted to the practice. And don't forget Von Blon is German-trained. . . ." Vance glanced up suddenly. "By the by, what about those two wills?"

There was a look of astonished interrogation in Markham's incisive stare, but he said merely:

"I'll have them later this afternoon. Buckway has been laid up with a cold, but he promised to send me copies to-day."

Vance got to his feet.

"I'm no Chaldean," he drawled; "but I have an idea those two wills may help us to understand the disappearance of the doctor's pellets." He drew on his coat and took up his hat and stick. "And now I'm going to banish this beastly affair from my thoughts.—Come, Van. There's some good chamber-music at Æolian Hall this afternoon, and if we hurry we'll be in time for the Mozart '*C-major.*' "

CHAPTER XVII

TWO WILLS

(Tuesday, November 30; 8 p. m.)

Eight o'clock that night found Inspector Moran, Sergeant Heath, Markham, Vance, and me seated about a small conference-table in one of the Stuyvesant Club's private rooms. The evening papers had created a furore in the city with their melodramatic accounts of Rex Greene's murder; and these early stories were, as we all knew, but the mild forerunners of what the morning journals would publish. The situation itself, without the inevitable impending strictures of the press, was sufficient to harry and depress those in charge of the official investigation; and, as I looked round the little circle of worried faces that night, I realized the tremendous importance that attached to the outcome of our conference.

Markham was the first to speak.

"I have brought copies of the wills; but before we discuss them I'd like to know if there have been any new developments."

"Developments!" Heath snorted contemptuously. "We've been going round in a circle all afternoon, and the faster we went the quicker we got to where we started. Mr. Markham, not one damn thing turned up to give us a line of inquiry. If it wasn't for the fact that no gun was found in the room, I'd turn in a report of suicide and then resign from the force."

"Fie on you, Sergeant!" Vance made a half-hearted attempt at levity. "It's a bit too early to give way to such gloomy pessimism.—I take it that Captain Dubois found no finger-prints."

"Oh, he found finger-prints, all right—Ada's, and Rex's, and Sproot's, and a couple of the doctor's. But that don't get us anywheres."

"Where were the prints?"

"Everywhere—on the door-knobs, the centre-table, the window-panes; some were even found on the woodwork above the mantel."

"That last fact may prove interestin' some day, though it doesn't seem to mean much just now.—Anything more about the footprints?"

"Nope. I got Jerym's report late this afternoon; but it don't say anything new. The galoshes you found made the tracks."

"That reminds me, Sergeant. What did you do with the galoshes?"

Heath gave him a sly, exultant grin.

"Just exactly what you'd have done with 'em, Mr. Vance. Only—I thought of it first."

Vance smiled back.

. . "*Salve!* Yes, the idea entirely slipped my mind this morning. In fact, it only just occurred to me."

"May I know what was done with the galoshes?" interjected Markham impatiently.

"Why, the Sergeant returned them surreptitiously to the linen-closet, and placed them under the drugget whence they came."

"Right!" Heath nodded with satisfaction. "And I've got our new nurse keeping an eye on 'em. The minute they disappear she's to phone the Bureau."

"You had no trouble installing your woman?" asked Markham.

"A cinch. Everything went like clockwork. At a quarter to six the doc shows up; then at six comes the woman from the Central Office. After the doc has put her wise to her new duties, she gets into her uniform and goes in to Mrs. Greene. The old lady tells the doc she didn't like this Miss Craven anyway, and hopes the new nurse will show her more consideration. Things couldn't have gone smoother. I hung around until I got a chance to tip our woman off about the galoshes; then I came away."

"Which of our women did you give the case to, Sergeant?" Moran asked.

"O'Brien—the one who handled the Sitwell affair. Nothing in that house will get by O'Brien; and she's as strong as a man."

"There's another thing you'd better speak to her about as soon as possible." And Markham related in detail the facts of Von Blon's visit to the office after lunch. "If those drugs were stolen in the Greene mansion, your woman may be able to find some trace of them."

Markham's account of the missing poisons had produced a profound effect on both Heath and the Inspector.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the latter. "Is this affair going to develop into a poisoning case? It would be the finishing touch." His apprehension went much deeper than his tone implied.

Heath sat staring at the polished table-top with futile consternation.

"Morphine and strychnine! There's no use look-

ing for the stuff. There's a hundred places in the house where it could be hid; and we might search a month and not find it. Anyway, I'll go out there tonight and tell O'Brien to watch for it. If she's on the lookout she maybe can spot any attempt to use it."

"What astounds me," remarked the Inspector, "is the security felt by the thief. Within an hour of the time Rex Greene is shot the poison disappears from the upper hall. Good Gad! That's cold-bloodedness for you! And nerve, too!"

"There's plenty of cold-bloodedness and nerve in this case," answered Vance. "A relentless determination is back of these murders—and calculation no end. I wouldn't be surprised if the doctor's satchel had been searched a score of times before. Perhaps there's been a patient accumulation of the drugs. This morning's theft may have been the final raid. I see in this whole affair a carefully worked-out plot that's been in preparation perhaps for years. We're dealing with the persistency of an *idée fixe*, and with the demoniacal logic of insanity. And—what is even more hideous—we're confronted with the perverted imagination of a fantastically romantic mind. We're pitted against a fiery, egocentric, hallucinated optimism. And this type of optimism has tremendous stamina and power. The history of nations has been convulsed by it. Mohammed, Bruno, and Jeanne d'Arc—as well as Torquemada, Agrippina, and Robespierre—all had it. It operates in different degrees, and to different ends; but the spirit of individual revolution is at the bottom of it."

"Hell, Mr. Vance!" Heath was uneasy. "You're

trying to make this case something that ain't—well, natural."

"Can you make it anything else, Sergeant? Already there have been three murders and an attempted murder. And now comes the theft of the poisons from Von Blon."

Inspector Moran drew himself up and rested his elbows on the table.

"Well, what's to be done? That, I believe, is the business of to-night's conclave." He forced himself to speak with matter-of-factness. "We can't break up the establishment; and we can't assign a separate bodyguard for each remaining member of the household."

"No; and we can't give 'em the works at the police station, either," grumbled Heath.

"It wouldn't help you if you could, Sergeant," said Vance. "There's no third degree known that could unseal the lips of the person who is executing this particular *opus*. There's too much fanaticism and martyrdom in it."

"Suppose we hear those wills, Mr. Markham," suggested Moran. "We may then be able to figure out a motive.—You'll admit, won't you, Mr. Vance, that there's a pretty strong motive back of these killings?"

"There can be no doubt as to that. But I don't believe it's money. Money may enter into it—and probably does—but only as a contribut'ry factor. I'd say the motive was more fundamental—that it had its matrix in some powerful but suppressed human passion. However, the financial conditions may lead us to those depths."

Markham had taken from his pocket several legal-sized sheets of closely typed paper, and smoothed them on the table before him.

"There's no necessity to read these *verbatim*," he said. "I've gone over them thoroughly and can tell you briefly what they contain." He took up the top sheet and held it nearer to the light. "Tobias Greene's last will, drawn up less than a year before his death, makes the entire family, as you know, the residuary devisees, with the stipulation that they live on the estate and maintain it intact for twenty-five years. At the end of that time the property may be sold or otherwise disposed of. I might mention that the domiciliary stipulation was particularly strict: the legatees must live in the Greene mansion *in esse* —no technicality will suffice. They are permitted to travel and make visits; but such absences may not exceed three months in each respective year. . . ."

"What provision was made in case one of them should marry?" asked the Inspector.

"None. Even marriage on the part of any of the legatees did not vitiate the restrictions of the will. If a Greene married, he or she had to live out the twenty-five years on the estate just the same. The husband or wife could share the residence, of course. In event of children the will provided for the erection of two other small dwellings on the 52d Street side of the lot. Only one exception was made to these stipulations. If Ada should marry, she could live elsewhere without losing her inheritance, as she apparently was not Tobias's own child and could not, therefore, carry on the blood line of the Greenes."

"What penalties attached to a breaking of the

domiciliary terms of the will?" Again the Inspector put the question.

"Only one penalty—disinheritance, complete and absolute."

"A rigid old bird," murmured Vance. "But the important thing about the will is, I should say, the manner in which he left the money. How was this distributed?"

"It wasn't distributed. With the exception of a few minor bequests, it was left in its entirety to the widow. She was to have the use of it during her lifetime, and could, at her death, dispose of it to the children—and grandchildren, if any—as she saw fit. It was imperative, however, that it all remain in the family."

"Where do the present generation of Greenes get their living expenses? Are they dependent on the old lady's bounty?"

"Not exactly. A provision was made for them in this way: each of the five children was to receive from the executors a stipulated amount from Mrs. Greene's income, sufficient for personal needs." Markham folded up the paper. "And that about covers Tobias's will."

"You spoke of a few minor bequests," said Vance. "What were they?"

"Sproot was left a competency, for instance—enough to take care of him comfortably whenever he wished to retire from service. Mrs. Mannheim, also, was to receive an income for life beginning at the end of the twenty-five years."

"Ah! Now, that's most interestin'. And in the meantime she could, if she chose, remain as cook at a liberal salary."

"Yes, that was the arrangement."

"The status of Frau Mannheim fascinates me. I have a feeling that some day ere long she and I will have a heart-to-heart talk.—Any other minor bequests?"

"A hospital, where Tobias recovered from typhus fever contracted in the tropics; and a donation to the chair of criminology at the University of Prague. I might mention too, as a curious item, that Tobias left his library to the New York Police Department, to be turned over to them at the expiration of the twenty-five years."

Vance drew himself up with puzzled interest.

"Amazin'!"

Heath had turned to the Inspector.

"Did you know anything about this, sir?"

"It seems to me I've heard of it. But a gift of books a quarter of a century in the future isn't apt to excite the officials of the force."

Vance, to all appearances, was smoking with indolent unconcern; but the precise way he held his cigarette told me that some unusual speculation was absorbing his mind.

"The will of Mrs. Greene," Markham went on, "touches more definitely on present conditions, though personally I see nothing helpful in it. She has been mathematically impartial in doling out the estate. The five children—Julia, Chester, Sibella, Rex, and Ada—receive equal amounts under its terms—that is, each gets a fifth of the entire estate."

"That part of it don't interest me," put in the Sergeant. "What I want to know is, who gets all this money in case the others pass outa the picture?"

"The provision covering that point is quite simple," explained Markham. "Should any of the children die before a new will is drawn, their share of the inheritance is distributed equally among the remaining beneficiaries."

"Then when any one of 'em passes out, all the others benefit. And if all of 'em, except one, should die, that one would get everything—huh?"

"Yes."

"So, as it stands now, Sibella and Ada would get everything — fifty-fifty — provided the old lady croaked."

"That's correct, Sergeant."

"But suppose both Sibella and Ada, as well as the old lady, should die: what would become of the money?"

"If either of the girls had a husband, the estate would pass to him. But, in event of Sibella and Ada dying single, everything would go to the State. That is to say, the State would get it provided there were no relatives alive—which I believe is the case."

Heath pondered these possibilities for several minutes.

"I can't see anything in the situation to give us a lead," he lamented. "Everybody benefits equally by what's already happened. And there's three of the family still left—the old lady and the two girls."

"Two from three leaves one, Sergeant," suggested Vance quietly.

"What do you mean by that, sir?"

"The morphine and the strychnine."

Heath gave a start and made an ugly face.

"By God!" He struck the table with his fist. "It

ain't coming to that if I can stop it!" Then a sense of helplessness tempered his outraged resolution, and he became sullen.

"I know how you feel." Vance spoke with troubled discouragement. "But I'm afraid we'll all have to wait. If the Greene millions are an actuating force in this affair, there's no way on earth to avert at least one more tragedy."

"We might put the matter up to the two girls and perhaps induce them to separate and go away," ventured the Inspector.

"That would only postpone the inevitable," Vance returned. "And besides, it would rob them of their patrimony."

"A court ruling might be obtained upsetting the provisions of the will," submitted Markham dubiously.

Vance gave him an ironical smile.

"By the time you could get one of your beloved courts to act the murderer would have had time to wipe out the entire local judiciary."

For nearly two hours ways and means of dealing with the case were discussed; but obstacles confronted nearly every line of activity advocated. Finally it was agreed that the only practicable tactics to be pursued were those of the routine police procedure. However, before the conference broke up, certain specific decisions had been taken. The guard about the Greene estate was to be increased, and a man was to be placed on the upper floor of the Narcoss Flats to keep a close watch on the front door and windows. On some pretext or other a detective was to be kept inside of the house as many hours as possible during

the day; and the telephone-line of the Greenes was to be tapped.

Vance insisted, somewhat against Markham's inclination, that every one in the house and every person who called there—however seemingly remote his connection with the case—should be regarded as a suspect and watched vigilantly; and Heath was ordered by the Inspector to convey this decision to O'Brien, lest her instinctive partiality should result in the relaxation of her scrutiny of certain persons. The Sergeant, it seemed, had already instituted a thorough investigation into the private affairs of Julia, Chester, and Rex; and a dozen men were at work on their associates and activities outside of the Greene mansion, with special instructions to gather reports of conversations which might have contained some hint or reference indicating a foreknowledge or suspicion of the crimes.

Just as Markham rose to terminate the discussion Vance again leaned forward and spoke.

"In case there is to be a poisoning we should, I think, be prepared. Where overdoses of either morphine or strychnine are administered immediate action will sometimes save the victim. I would suggest that an official physician be placed in the Narcoss Flats with the man set to watch the Greene windows; and he should have at hand all the necess'ry apparatus and antidotes used in combating morphine and strychnine poisoning. Furthermore, I would suggest that we arrange some sort of signal with Sproot and the new nurse, so that, should anything happen, our doctor can be summoned without a moment's delay. If the victim of the attempted poisoning were saved,

we might be able to ascertain who administered the drug."

The plan was readily agreed to. The Inspector took it upon himself to arrange the matter that night with one of the official police surgeons; and Heath went at once to the Narcoss Flats to secure a room facing the Greene mansion.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE LOCKED LIBRARY

(Wednesday, December 1; 1 p. m.)

Vance, contrary to his custom, rose early the next morning. He was rather waspish, and I left him severely alone. He made several desultory attempts at reading, and once, when he put his book down, I glanced at the title,—he had chosen a life of Genghis Khan! Later in the forenoon he attempted to busy himself with cataloguing his Chinese prints.

We were to have lunch with Markham at the Lawyers Club at one o'clock, and at a little after twelve Vance ordered his powerful Hispano-Suiza. He always drove himself when engaged on a problem: the activity seemed to steady his nerves and clarify his brain.

Markham was waiting for us, and it was only too plain from his expression that something of a disturbing nature had occurred.

"Unburden, old dear," invited Vance, when we were seated at our table in a corner of the main dining-room. "You look as serious as Saint John of Patmos. I'm sure something wholly to be expected has happened. Have the galoshes disappeared?"

Markham looked at him with some wonder.

"Yes! The O'Brien woman called the Bureau at nine o'clock this morning and reported that they had been removed from the linen-closet during the night. They were there, however, when she went to bed."

"And, of course, they have not been found."

"No. She made a pretty careful search before phoning."

"Fancy that. But she might have saved herself the trouble.—What does the doughty Sergeant opine?"

"Heath reached the house before ten o'clock, and made an investigation. But he learned nothing. No one admitted hearing any sound in the hall during the night. He re-searched the house himself, but without result."

"Have you heard from Von Blon this morning?"

"No; but Heath saw him. He came to the house about ten and stayed nearly an hour. He appeared very much upset over the stolen drugs, and immediately asked if any trace of them had been found. He spent most of the hour with Sibella."

"Ah, welladay! Let us enjoy our *truffes gastronome* without the intrusion of unpleasant speculations. This Madeira sauce, by the by, is very good." Thus Vance dismissed the subject.

However, that luncheon was to prove a memorable one; for toward the end of the meal Vance made a suggestion—or, rather, insisted upon an action—that was eventually to solve and explain the terrible tragedies at the Greene mansion. We had reached our dessert when, after a long silence, he looked up at Markham and said:

"The Pandora complex has seized and mastered me. I simply must get into Tobias's locked library. That sacred adytum has begun to infest my slumbers; and ever since you mentioned the legacy of those books I've had no rest. I yearn to become ac-

quainted with Tobias's literary taste, and to learn why he should have selected the police for his beneficiaries."

"But, my dear Vance, what possible connection——?"

"Desist! You can't think of a question I have not already put to myself; and I'm unable to answer any of them. But the fact remains, I must inspect that library even if you have to get a judicial order to batter down the door. There are sinister undercurrents in that old house, Markham; and a hint or two may be found in that secret room."

"It will be a difficult proceeding if Mrs. Greene stands firm on her refusal to deliver the key to us." Markham, I could see, had already acquiesced. He was in a mood to accede to any suggestion that even remotely promised a clarification of the problem posed by the Greene murders.

It was nearly three o'clock when we reached the house. Heath had already arrived, in answer to a telephone call from Markham; and we at once presented ourselves to Mrs. Greene. Following an ocular sign from the Sergeant the new nurse left the room; and Markham went directly to the point. The old lady had eyed us suspiciously as we came in, and now sat rigidly against her pile of pillows, her gaze fixed on Markham with defensive animosity.

"Madam," he began, somewhat severely, "we regret the necessity of this call. But certain things have arisen which make it imperative that we visit Mr. Greene's library. . . ."

"You sha'n't!" she broke in, her voice rising in an infuriated *crescendo*. "You sha'n't put your foot in

that room! Not for twelve years has any one passed the threshold, and no policeman now shall desecrate the place where my husband spent the last years of his life."

"I appreciate the sentiment that actuates your refusal," replied Markham; "but graver considerations have intervened. The room will have to be searched."

"Not if you kill me!" she cried. "How dare you force your way into my house——?"

Markham held up his hand authoritatively.

"I am not here to argue the matter. I came to you merely to ask for the key. Of course, if you prefer to have us break down the door. . . ." He drew a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "I have secured a search-warrant for that room; and it would cause me deep regret to have to serve it on you." (I was amazed at his aggressive daring, for I knew he had no warrant.)

Mrs. Greene broke forth with imprecations. Her anger became almost insensate, and she was changed into a creature at once repulsive and pitiful. Markham waited calmly for her paroxysm of fury to pass; and when, her vituperation spent, she beheld his quiet, inexorable bearing, she knew that she had lost. She sank back, white and exhausted.

"Take the key," she capitulated bitterly, "and save me the final infamy of having my house torn down by ruffians. . . . It's in the ivory jewel-case in the top drawer of that cabinet." She pointed weakly to the lacquered high-boy.

Vance crossed the room and secured the key—a long, old-fashioned instrument with a double bit and a filigreed bow.

"Have you always kept the key in this jewel-case, Mrs. Greene?" he asked, as he closed the drawer.

"For twelve years," she whined. "And now, after all that time, it is to be taken from me by force—and by the police, the very people who should be protecting an old, helpless paralytic like me. It's infamy! But what can I expect? Every one takes delight in torturing me."

Markham, his object gained, became contrite, and endeavored to pacify her by explaining the seriousness of the situation. But in this he failed; and a few moments later he joined us in the hall.

"I don't like this sort of thing, Vance," he said.

"You did remarkably well, however. If I hadn't been with you since lunch I'd have believed you really had a search-warrant. You are a veritable Machiavelli. *Te saluto!*"

"Get on with your business, now that you have the key," ordered Markham irritably. And we descended to the main hall.

Vance looked about him cautiously to make sure we were not observed, and led the way to the library.

"The lock works rather easily, considering its twelve years of desuetude," he remarked, as he turned the key and gently pushed open the massive oak door. "And the hinges don't even creak. Astonishin'."

Blackness confronted us, and Vance struck a match.

"Please don't touch anything," he admonished, and, holding the match high before him, he crossed to the heavy velour draperies of the east window.

As he drew them apart a cloud of dust filled the air.

"These curtains, at least, have not been touched for years," he said.

The gray light of mid-afternoon suffused the room, revealing an astonishing retreat. The walls were lined with open book-shelves which reached from the floor nearly to the ceiling, leaving only space enough for a row of marble busts and squat bronze vases. At the southern end of the room was a massive flat-topped desk, and in the centre stood a long carved table laden with curious and outlandish ornaments. Beneath the windows and in the corners were piles of pamphlets and portfolios; and along the moulding of the bookcases hung gargoyles and old prints yellow with age. Two enormous Persian lamps of perforated brass depended from the ceiling, and beside the centre-table stood a Chinese sconce eight feet high. The floor was covered with overlapping Oriental rugs laid at all angles; and at each end of the fireplace was a hideous, painted totem-pole reaching to the beams. A thick coating of dust overlay everything.

Vance returned to the door and, striking another match, closely examined the inner knob.

"Some one," he announced, "has been here recently. There's no sign of dust on this knob."

"We might get the finger-prints," suggested Heath.

Vance shook his head.

"Not even worth trying. The person we're dealing with knows better than to leave sign manuals."

He closed the door softly and threw the bolt. Then

he looked about him. Presently he pointed beneath a huge geographical globe beside the desk.

"There are your galoshes, Sergeant. I thought they'd be here."

Heath almost threw himself upon them, and carried them to the window.

"They're the ones, all right," he declared.

Markham gave Vance one of his annoyed, calculating stares.

"You've got some theory," he asserted, in an accusing tone.

"Nothing more than I've already told you. The finding of the galoshes was wholly incidental. I'm interested in other things—just what, I don't know."

He stood near the centre-table and let his eyes roam over the objects of the room. Presently his gaze came to rest on a low wicker reading-chair the right arm of which was shaped into a book-rest. It stood within a few feet of the wall opposite to the fireplace, facing a narrow section of book-shelves that was surmounted by a replica of the Capitoline Museum bust of Vespasian.

"Most untidy," he murmured. "I'm sure that chair wasn't left in that position twelve years ago.

He moved forward, and stood looking down at it musingly. Instinctively Markham and Heath followed him; and then they saw the thing that he had been contemplating. On the table-arm of the chair was a deep saucer in which stood the thick stub of a candle. The saucer was almost filled with smoky wax drippings.

"It took many candles to fill that dish," commented Vance; "and I doubt if the departed Tobias

did his reading by candle-light." He touched the seat and the back of the chair, and then examined his hand. "There's dust, but nowhere near a decade's accumulation. Some one has been browsing in this library rather recently; and he was dashed secretive about it. He didn't dare draw the shades or turn on the lights. He sat here with a single candle, sampling Tobias's brand of literature. And it apparently appealed to him, for this one saucer contains evidence of many bookish nights. How many other saucers of paraffin there were we don't know."

"The old lady could tell us who had a chance to put the key back this morning after hiding the galoshes," offered Heath.

"No one put the key back this morning, Sergeant. The person who was in the habit of visiting here wouldn't have stolen it and returned it on each occasion when he could have had a duplicate made in fifteen minutes."

"I guess you're right." The Sergeant was sorely perplexed. "But as long as we don't know who's got the key, we're no better off than we were."

"We're not quite through yet with our scrutiny of the library," rejoined Vance. "As I told Mr. Markham at lunch, my main object in coming here was to ascertain Tobias's taste in literature."

"A lot of good that'll do you!"

"One never can tell. Tobias, remember, bequeathed his library to the Police Department. . . . Let's see with what tomes the old boy whiled away his inactive hours."

Vance took out his monocle and, polishing it carefully, fitted it to his eye. Then he turned to the near-

est book-shelves. I stepped forward and looked over his shoulder; and, as my glance ran over the dusty titles, I could scarcely suppress an exclamation of amazement. Here was one of the most complete and unusual private libraries of criminology in America—and I was familiar with many of the country's famous collections. Crime in all its phases and ramifications was represented. Rare old treatises, long out of print and now the delight of bibliophiles, shouldered one another in compact tiers on Tobias Greene's shelves.

Nor were the subjects of these books limited to a narrow interpretation of criminology. All the various allied branches of the subject were represented. There were entire sections devoted to insanity and cretinism, social and criminal pathology, suicide, pauperism and philanthropy, prison-reform, prostitution and morphinism, capital punishment, abnormal psychology, legal codes, the argot of the underworld and code-writing, toxicology, and police methods. The volumes were in many languages—English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Russian, Dutch, and Latin.*

* Among the volumes of Tobias Greene's library I may mention the following as typical of the entire collection: Heinroth's "De morborum animi et pathematum animi differentia," Hoh's "De maniæ pathologia," P. S. Knight's "Observations on the Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment of Derangement of the Mind," Krafft-Ebing's "Grundzüge der Kriminal-Psychologie," Bailey's "Diary of a Resurrectionist," Lange's "Om Arvelighedens Inflydelse i Sindssygedommene," Leuret's "Fragments psychologiques sur la folie," D'Aguanno's "Recensioni di antropologia giuridica," Amos's "Crime and Civilization," Andronico's "Studi clinici sul delitto," Lombroso's "Uomo Delinquente," de Aramburu's "La nueva ciencia penal," Bleakley's "Some Distinguished Victims of the Scaffold," Arenal's "Psychologie comparée du criminel," Aubry's "De l'homicide commis par la femme," Beccaria's "Crimes

Vance's eyes sparkled as he moved along the crowded shelves. Markham also was deeply interested; and Heath, bending here and there toward a volume, registered an expression of bewildered curiosity.

"My word!" murmured Vance. "No wonder your department, Sergeant, was chosen as the future cus-

and Punishments," Benedikt's "Anatomical Studies upon the Brains of Criminals," Bittinger's "Crimes of Passion and of Reflection," Bosselli's "Nuovi studi sul tatuaggio nei criminali," Favalli's "La delinquenza in rapporto alla civiltà," de Feyfer's "Verhandeling over den Kindermoord," Fuld's "Der Realismus und das Strafrecht," Hamilton's "Scientific Detection of Crime," von Holtzendorff's "Das Irische Gefängnissystem insbesondere die Zwischenanstalten vor der Entlassung der Sträflinge," Jardine's "Criminal Trials," Lacassagne's "L'homme criminel comparé à l'homme primitif," Llanos y Torriglia's "Ferri y su escuela," Owen Luke's "History of Crime in England," MacFarlane's "Lives and Exploits of Banditti," M'Levy's "Curiosities of Crime in Edinburgh," the "Complete Newgate Calendar," Pomeroy's "German and French Criminal Procedure," Rizzone's "Delinquenza e punibilità," Rosenblatt's "Skizzen aus der Verbrecherwelt," Soury's "Le crime et les criminels," Wey's "Criminal Anthropology," Amadei's "Crani d'assassini," Benedikt's "Der Raubthiertypus am menschlichen Gehirne," Fasini's "Studi su delinquenti femmine," Mills's "Arrested and Aberrant Development and Gyres in the Brain of Paranoiacs and Criminals," de Paoli's "Quattro crani di delinquenti," Zuckerkandl's "Morphologie des Gesichtsschädels," Bergonzoli's "Sui pazzi criminali in Italia," Brierre de Boismont's "Rapports de la folie suicide avec la folie homicide," Buchnet's "The Relation of Madness to Crime," Calucci's "Il jure penale e la freniatria," Davey's "Insanity and Crime," Morel's "Le procès Chorinski," Parrot's "Sur la monomanie homicide," Savage's "Moral Insanity," Teed's "On Mind, Insanity, and Criminality," Worckmann's "On Crime and Insanity," Vaucher's "Système préventif des délits et des crimes," Thacker's "Psychology of Vice and Crime," Tarde's "La Criminalité Comparée," Tamassia's "Gli ultimi studi sulla criminalità," Sikes's "Studies of Assassination," Senior's "Remarkable Crimes and Trials in Germany," Savarini's "Vexata Quæstio," Sampson's "Rationale of Crime," Noellner's "Kriminal-psychologische Denkwürdigkeiten," Sighele's "La foule criminelle," and Korsakoff's "Kurs psichiatrii."

todian of these tomes. What a collection! Extr'ordin'ry!—Aren't you glad, Markham, you wangled the old lady into relinquishing the key——?"

Suddenly he stiffened and jerked his head toward the door, at the same time lifting his hand for silence. I, too, had heard a slight noise in the hall, like some one brushing against the woodwork of the door, but had thought nothing of it. For a few moments we waited tensely. But no further sound came to us, and Vance stepped quickly to the door and drew it open. The hall was empty. He stood on the threshold for a while listening. Then he closed the door, and turned again to the room.

"I could have sworn some one was listening in the hall."

"I heard a rustle of some kind," Markham corroborated him. "I took it for granted it was Sproot or the maid passing by."

"Why should anybody's hanging round the hall worry us, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked.

"I really couldn't say, don't y' know. But it bothers me, nevertheless. If some one was at the door listening, it shows that our presence here has produced a state of anxiety in the person privy to the fact. It's possible, d' ye see, that some one is desirous of ascertaining what we have found out."

"Well, I can't see that we've found out enough to make anybody lose any sleep," mumbled Heath.

"You're so discouraging, Sergeant." Vance sighed and went to the book-shelves in front of the wicker reading-chair. "There may be something in this section to cheer us. Let us see if there's a glad tiding or two written in the dust."

He struck match after match as he carefully inspected the tops of the books, beginning at the highest shelf and systematically scrutinizing the volumes of each row. He had reached the second shelf from the floor when he bent over curiously and gave a second long look at two thick gray volumes. Then, putting out the match, he took the volumes to the window.

"The thing is quite mad," he remarked, after a brief examination. "These are the only books within arm's reach of the chair that have been handled recently. And what do you think they are? An old two-volume edition of Professor Hans Gross's 'Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik,' or—to claw the title loosely into the vulgate—'A Handbook on the Criminal Sciences for Examining Magistrates.'" He gave Markham a look of facetious reproach. "I say, you haven't, by any chance, been spending your nights in this library learning how to ballyrag suspects?"

Markham ignored his levity. He recognized the outward sign of Vance's inner uneasiness.

"The apparently irrelevant theme of the book," he returned, "might indicate a mere coincidence between the visits of some person to this room and the crimes committed in the house."

Vance made no answer. He thoughtfully returned the books to their place and ran his eye over the remaining volumes of the bottom shelf. Suddenly he knelt down and struck another match.

"Here are several books out of place." I detected a subdued note of eagerness in his voice. "They belong in other sections; and they've been crowded in

here a little out of alignment. Moreover, they're innocent of dust. . . . 'Pon my soul, Markham, here's a coincidence for your sceptical legal mind! Lend an ear to these titles: 'Poisons: Their Effects and Detection,' by Alexander Wynter Blyth,* and 'Textbook of Medical Jurisprudence, Toxicology, and Public Health,' by John Glaister, professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Glasgow. And here we have Friedrich Brügelmann's 'Über hysterische Dämmerzustände,' and Schwarzwald's 'Über Hystero-Paralyse und Somnambulismus.'—I say! That's deuced queer. . . ."

He rose and walked up and down agitatedly.

"No—no; absolutely not," he muttered. "It simply can't be. . . . Why should Von Blon lie to us about her?"

We all knew what was in his mind. Even Heath sensed it at once, for, though he did not speak German, the titles of the two German books—especially the latter—needed no translation to be understood. Hysteria and twilight sleep! Hysterical paralysis and somnambulism! The gruesome and terrible implication in these two titles, and their possible relation to the sinister tragedies of the Greene mansion, sent a chill of horror over me.

Vance stopped his restless pacing and fixed a grave gaze on Markham.

"This thing gets deeper and deeper. Something unthinkable is going on here.—Come, let us get out of this polluted room. It has told us its gibbering, nightmarish story. And now we will have to inter-

* Doctor Blyth was one of the defense witnesses in the Crippen trial.

pret it—find some glimmer of sanity in its black suggestions.—Sergeant, will you draw the curtains while I straighten these books? We'd best leave no evidence of our visit."

CHAPTER XIX

SHERRY AND PARALYSIS

(Wednesday, December 1; 4.30 p. m.)

When we returned to Mrs. Greene's room the old lady was apparently sleeping peacefully and we did not disturb her. Heath gave the key to Nurse O'Brien with instructions to replace it in the jewel-case, and we went down-stairs.

Although it was but a little past four o'clock, the early winter twilight had already descended. Sproot had not yet lighted the lamps, and the lower hall was in semidarkness. A ghostly atmosphere pervaded the house. Even the silence was oppressive, and seemed fraught with the spirit of commination. We went straight to the hall table where we had thrown our coats, eager to get out into the open air.

But we were not to shake the depressing influence of the old mansion so quickly. We had scarcely reached the table when there came a slight stirring of the portières of the archway opposite to the drawing-room, and a tense, whispered voice said:

"Mr. Vance—please!"

We turned, startled. There, just inside of the reception-room, hiding behind the heavy draperies, stood Ada, her face a patch of ghastly white in the gathering gloom. With one finger placed on her lips for silence, she beckoned to us; and we stepped softly into the chill, unused room.

"There's something I must tell you," she said, in a half-whisper, "—something terrible! I was going

to telephone you to-day, but I was afraid. . . ." A fit of trembling seized her.

"Don't be frightened, Ada," Vance encouraged her soothingly. "In a few days all these awful things will be over.—What have you to tell us?"

She made an effort to draw herself together, and when the tremor had passed she went on hesitantly.

"Last night—it was long after midnight—I woke, and felt hungry. So I got up, slipped on a wrap, and stole down-stairs. Cook always leaves something in the pantry for me. . . ." Again she stopped, and her haunted eyes searched our faces. "But when I reached the lower landing of the stairs I heard a soft, shuffling sound in the hall—far back, near the library door. My heart was in my mouth, but I made myself look over the banister. And just then—some one struck a match. . . ."

Her trembling began afresh, and she clutched Vance's arm with both hands. I was afraid the girl was going to faint, and I moved closer to her; but Vance's voice seemed to steady her.

"Who was it, Ada?"

She caught her breath and looked about her, her face the picture of deadly fear. Then she leaned forward.

"It was mother! . . . *And she was walking!*"

The dread significance of this revelation chilled us all into silence. After a moment a choked whistle escaped Heath; and Markham threw back his head like a man shaking himself out of an encroaching spell of hypnosis. It was Vance who first recovered himself sufficiently to speak.

"Your mother was near the library door?"

"Yes; and it seemed as though she held a key in her hand."

"Was she carrying anything else?" Vance's effort at calmness was only half successful.

"I didn't notice—I was too terrified."

"Could she, for instance, have been carrying a pair of galoshes?" he persisted.

"She might have been. I don't know. She had on her long Oriental shawl, and it fell down about her in folds. Maybe under the shawl. . . . Or she might have put them down when she struck the match. I only know I saw her—moving slowly . . . there in the darkness."

The memory of that unbelievable vision completely took possession of the girl. Her eyes stared, trance-like, into the deepening shadows.

Markham cleared his throat nervously.

"You say yourself it was dark in the hall last night, Miss Greene. Perhaps your fears got the better of you. Are you sure it might not have been Hemming or the cook?"

She brought her eyes back to Markham with sudden resentment.

"No!" Then her voice took on its former note of terror. "It was mother. The match was burning close to her face, and there was a terrible look in her eyes. I was only a few feet from her—looking straight down on her."

Her hold on Vance's arm tightened, and once more her agonized gaze turned to him.

"Oh, what does it mean? I thought—I thought mother could never walk again."

Vance ignored her anguished appeal.

"Tell me this, for it's very important: did your mother see you?"

"I—don't know." Her words were scarcely audible. "I drew back and ran softly up the stairs. Then I locked myself in my room."

Vance did not speak at once. He regarded the girl for a moment, and then gave her a slow, comforting smile.

"And I think your room is the best place for you now," he said. "Don't worry over what you saw; and keep what you have told us to yourself. There's nothing to be afraid of. Certain types of paralytics have been known to walk in their sleep under the stress of shock or excitement. Anyway, we'll arrange for the new nurse to sleep in your room to-night." And with a friendly pat on her arm he sent her upstairs.

After Heath had given Miss O'Brien the necessary instructions we left the house and walked toward First Avenue.

"Good God, Vance!" said Markham huskily. "We've got to move quickly. That child's story opens up new and frightful possibilities."

"Couldn't you get a commitment for the old woman to some sanitarium to-morrow, sir?" asked Heath.

"On what grounds? It's a pathological case, pure and simple. We haven't a scrap of evidence."

"I shouldn't attempt it, in any event," interposed Vance. "We mustn't be hasty. There are several conclusions to be drawn from Ada's story; and if the thing that all of us is thinking should be wrong, we'd only make matters worse by a false move. We

might delay the slaughter for the time being; but we'd learn nothing. And our only hope is to find out —some way—what's at the bottom of this atrocious business."

"Yeh? And how are we going to do that, Mr. Vance?" Heath spoke with despair.

"I don't know now. But the Greene household is safe for to-night anyway; and that gives us a little time. I think I'll have another talk with Von Blon. Doctors—especially the younger ones—are apt to give snap diagnoses."

Heath had hailed a taxicab, and we were headed down-town along Third Avenue.

"It can certainly do no harm," agreed Markham. "And it might bring forth something suggestive. When will you tackle him?"

Vance was gazing out of the window.

"Why not at once?" Suddenly his mood had changed. "Here we are in the Forties. And tea-time! What could be more opportune?"

He leaned over and gave the chauffeur an order. In a few minutes the taxicab drew up to the curb before Von Blon's brownstone residence.

The doctor received us apprehensively.

"Nothing wrong, I hope?" he asked, trying to read our faces.

"Oh, no," Vance answered easily. "We were passing and thought we'd drop in for a dish of tea and a medical chat."

Von Blon studied him with a slight suspicion.

"Very well. You gentlemen shall have both." He rang for his man. "But I can do even better. I've some old Amontillado sherry——"

"My word!" Vance bowed ceremoniously and turned to Markham. "You see how fortune favors her punctual children?"

The wine was brought and carefully decanted.

Vance took up his glass and sipped it. One would have thought, from his manner, that nothing in the world at that moment was as important as the quality of the wine.

"Ah, my dear doctor," he remarked, with some ostentation, "the blender on the sunny Andalusian slopes unquestionably had many rare and valuable butts with which to glorify this vintage. There was little need for the addition of *vino dulce* that year; but then, the Spaniards always sweeten their wine, probably because the English object to the slightest dryness. And it's the English, you know, who buy all the best sherries. They have always loved their 'sherris-sack'; and many a British bard has immortalized it in song. Ben Jonson sang its praises, and so did Tom Moore and Byron. But it was Shakespeare—an ardent lover of sherry himself—who penned the greatest and most passionate panegyric to it. You remember Falstaff's apostrophe?—'It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapors which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery and delectable shapes. . . .' Sherry, you probably know, doctor, was once regarded as a cure for gout and other malaises of faulty metabolism."

He paused and put down his glass.

"I wonder that you haven't prescribed this delicious sherry for Mrs. Greene long ago. I'm sure

she would serve you with a writ of confiscation if she knew you had it."

"The fact is," Von Blon returned, "I once took her a bottle, and she gave it to Chester. She doesn't care for wine. I remember my father's telling me she objected violently to her husband's well-stocked cellar."

"Your father died, did he not, before Mrs. Greene became paralyzed?" Vance asked incuriously.

"Yes—about a year."

"And was yours the only diagnosis made of her case?"

Von Blon looked at him with an air of gentle surprise.

"Yes. I saw no necessity of calling in any of the bigwigs. The symptoms were clear-cut and conformed with the anamnesis. Furthermore, everything since then has confirmed my diagnosis."

"And yet, doctor"—Vance spoke with great deference—"something has occurred which, from the layman's point of view, tends to cast doubt on the accuracy of that diagnosis. Therefore, I feel sure you will forgive me when I ask you quite frankly if it would not be possible to place another, and perhaps less serious, interpretation on Mrs. Greene's invalidism."

Von Blon appeared greatly puzzled.

"There is," he said, "not the slightest possibility that Mrs. Greene is suffering from any disease other than an organic paralysis of both legs—a paraplegia, in fact, of the entire lower part of the body."

"If you were to see Mrs. Greene move her legs, what would be your mental reaction?"

Von Blon stared at him incredulously. Then he forced a laugh.

"My mental reaction? I'd know my liver was out of order, and that I was having hallucinations."

"And if you knew your liver was functioning perfectly—then what?"

"I'd immediately become a devout believer in miracles."

Vance smiled pleasantly.

"I sincerely hope it won't come to that. And yet so-called therapeutic miracles have happened."

"I'll admit that medical history is filled with what the uninitiated call miraculous cures. But there is sound pathology beneath all of them. In Mrs. Greene's case, however, I can see no loophole for error. If she should move her legs, it would contravert all the known laws of physiology."

"By the by, doctor"—Vance put the question abruptly—"are you familiar with Brügelmann's 'Über hysterische Dämmerzustände'?"

"No—I can't say that I am."

"Or with Schwarzwald's 'Über Hystero-Paralyse und Somnambulismus'?"

Von Blon hesitated, and his eyes were focussed intently like those of a man who is thinking rapidly.

"I know Schwarzwald, of course," he answered. "But I'm ignorant of the particular work you mention. . . ." Slowly a look of amazement dawned on his face. "Good heavens! You're not trying to connect the subjects of these books with Mrs. Greene's condition, are you?"

"If I were to tell you that both of these books are in the Greene mansion, what would you say?"

"I'd say their presence is no more relevant to the situation there than would be a copy of 'Die Leiden des jungen Werther' or Heine's 'Romanzero.'"

"I'm sorry I can't agree with you," returned Vance politely. "They are certainly relevant to our investigation, and I had hoped you might be able to explain the connection."

Von Blon appeared to ponder the matter, his face the picture of perplexity.

"I wish I could help you," he said, after several moments. Then he glanced up quickly: a new light had come into his eyes. "Permit me to suggest, sir, that you are laboring under a misapprehension as to the correct scientific connotation of the words in the titles of these two books. I have had occasion to do considerable reading along psychoanalytic lines; and both Freud and Jung use the terms '*Somnambulismus*' and '*Dämmerzustände*' in an entirely different sense from our common use of the terms 'somnambulism' and 'twilight sleep.' '*Somnambulismus*,' in the terminology of psychopathology and abnormal psychology, is employed in connection with ambivalence and dual personality: it designates the actions of the submerged, or subconscious, self in cases of aphasia, amnesia, and the like. It does not refer to one's walking in one's sleep. For instance, in psychic hysteria where one loses one's memory and adopts a new personality, the subject is called a '*Somnambule*.' It is the same as what the newspapers commonly refer to as an 'amnesia victim.'"

He rose and went to a bookcase. After a few moments' search he took down several volumes.

"Here we have, for example, an old monograph

by Freud and Breuer, written in 1893 and entitled 'Über den psychischen Mechanismus der hysterischen Phenomene.' If you care to take the trouble to read it, you will see that it is an exposition of the application of the term '*Somnambulismus*' to certain temporary neurotic derangements.—And here also is Freud's 'Traumdeutung,' published in 1894, in which this terminology is explained and amplified.—In addition to these, I have here 'Nervöse Angstzustände,' by Stekel, who, though he leads one of the most important schisms in the Freudian school, uses the same nomenclature in referring to split personality." He laid the three books on the table before Vance. "You may take them along if you like. They may throw some light on the quandary you are in."

"You are inclined to believe, then, that both Schwarzwald and Brügelmann refer to waking psychic states rather than the more common type of somnambulism?"

"Yes, I am inclined to that belief. I know Schwarzwald was a former lecturer at the Psychopatisches Institut, in constant contact with Freud and his teachings. But, as I told you, I am not familiar with either of the books."

"How would you account for the term 'hysteria' in both titles?"

"Its presence there is in no way contradictory. Aphasia, amnesia, aphonia—and often anosmia and apnœa—are symptoms of hysteria. And hysterical paralysis is quite common. There are many cases of paralytics who have been unable to move a muscle for years, as a result of sheer hysteria."

"Ah, exactly!" Vance picked up his glass and drained it. "That brings me to a rather unusual request I desire to make.—As you know, the papers are waxing severe in their criticism of the police and the District Attorney's office, and are accusing of negligence every one connected with the investigation of the Greene case. Therefore Mr. Markham has decided that it might be advisable for him to possess a report of Mrs. Greene's physical condition that would carry the very highest expert authority. And I was going to suggest that, merely as a matter of formal routine, we get such a report from, let us say, Doctor Felix Oppenheimer."*

Von Blon did not speak for several minutes. He sat toying nervously with his glass, his eyes fixed with intent calculation on Vance.

"It might be well for you to have the report," he acceded at last, "if only to dispel your own doubts on the subject.—No, I have no objection to the plan. I will be very glad to make the arrangements."

Vance rose.

"That's very generous of you, doctor. But I must urge you to attend to it without delay."

"I understand perfectly. I will get in touch with Doctor Oppenheimer in the morning and explain to him the official character of the situation. I'm sure he will expedite matters."

When we were again in the taxicab Markham gave voice to his perplexity.

"Von Blon strikes me as a particularly able and

* Doctor Felix Oppenheimer was then the leading authority on paralysis in America. He has since returned to Germany, where he now holds the chair of neurology at the University of Freiburg.

trustworthy man. And yet he has obviously gone woefully astray in regard to Mrs. Greene's illness. I fear he's in for a shock when he hears what Oppenheimer has to say after the examination."

"Y' know, Markham," said Vance sombrely, "I'll feel infinitely bucked if we succeed in getting that report from Oppenheimer."

"Succeed! What do you mean?"

" 'Pon my word, I don't know what I mean. I only know that there's a black terrible intrigue of some kind going on at the Greene house. And we don't yet know who's back of it. But it's some one who's watching us, who knows every move we make, and is thwarting us at every turn."

CHAPTER XX

THE FOURTH TRAGEDY

(Thursday, December 2; forenoon)

The following day was one that will ever remain in my memory. Despite the fact that what happened had been foreseen by all of us, nevertheless when it actually came it left us as completely stunned as if it had been wholly unexpected. Indeed, the very horror that informed our anticipation tended to intensify the enormity of the event.

The day broke dark and threatening. A damp chill was in the air; and the leaden skies clung close to the earth with suffocating menace. The weather was like a symbol of our gloomy spirits.

Vance rose early, and, though he said little, I knew the case was preying on his mind. After breakfast he sat before the fire for over an hour sipping his coffee and smoking. Then he made an attempt to interest himself in an old French edition of "Till Ulenspiegel," but, failing, took down Volume VII of Osler's "Modern Medicine" and turned to Buzzard's article on myelitis. For an hour he read with despairing concentration. At last he returned the book to the shelf.

At half past eleven Markham telephoned to inform us that he was leaving the office immediately for the Greene mansion and would stop *en route* to

pick us up. He refused to say more, and hung up the receiver abruptly.

It wanted ten minutes of being noon when he arrived; and his expression of grim discouragement told us more plainly than words that another tragedy had occurred. We had on our coats in readiness and accompanied him at once to the car.

"And who is it this time?" asked Vance, as we swung into Park Avenue.

"Ada." Markham spoke bitterly through his teeth.

"I was afraid of that, after what she told us yesterday.—With poison, I suppose."

"Yes—the morphine."

"Still, it's an easier death than strychnine-poisoning."

"She's not dead, thank God!" said Markham. "That is, she was still alive when Heath phoned."

"Heath? Was he at the house?"

"No. The nurse notified him at the Homicide Bureau, and he phoned me from there. He'll probably be at the Greenes' when we arrive."

"You say she isn't dead?"

"Drumm—he's the official police surgeon Moran stationed in the Narcoss Flats—got there immediately, and had managed to keep her alive up to the time the nurse phoned."

"Sproot's signal worked all right, then?"

"Apparently. And I want to say, Vance, that I'm damned grateful to you for that suggestion to have a doctor on hand."

When we arrived at the Greene mansion Heath who had been watching for us, opened the door.

"She ain't dead," he greeted us in a stage whisper; and then drew us into the reception-room to explain his secretive manner. "Nobody in the house except Sproot and O'Brien knows about this poisoning yet. Sproot found her, and then pulled down all the front curtains in this room—which was the signal agreed on. When Doc Drumm hopped across Sproot was waiting with the door open, and took him up-stairs without anybody seeing him. The doc sent for O'Brien, and after they'd worked on the girl for a while he told her to notify the Bureau. They're both up in the room now with the doors locked."

"You did right in keeping the thing quiet," Markham told him. "If Ada recovers we can hush it up and perhaps learn something from her."

"That's what I was thinking, sir. I told Sproot I'd wring his scrawny neck if he spilled anything to anybody."

"And," added Vance, "he bowed politely and said 'Yes, sir.' "

"You bet your life he did!"

"Where is the rest of the household at present?" Markham asked.

"Miss Sibella's in her room. She had breakfast in bed at half past ten and told the maid she was going back to sleep. The old lady's also asleep. The maid and the cook are in the back of the house somewhere."

"Has Von Blon been here this morning?" put in Vance.

"Sure he's been here—he comes regular. O'Brien said he called at ten, sat with the old lady about an hour, and then went away."

"And he hasn't been notified about the morphine?"

"What's the use? Drumm's a good doctor, and Von Blon might blab about it to Sibella or somebody."

"Quite right." Vance nodded his approval.

We re-entered the hall and divested ourselves of our wraps.

"While we're waiting for Doctor Drumm," said Markham, "we might as well find out what Sproot knows."

We went into the drawing-room, and Heath yanked the bell-cord. The old butler came directly and stood before us without the slightest trace of emotion. His imperturbability struck me as inhuman.

Markham beckoned him to come nearer.

"Now, Sproot, tell us exactly what took place."

"I was in the kitchen resting, sir"—the man's voice was as wooden as usual—"and I was just looking at the clock and thinking I would resume my duties, when the bell of Miss Ada's room rang. Each bell, you understand, sir——"

"Never mind that! What time was it?"

"It was exactly eleven o'clock. And, as I said, Miss Ada's bell rang. I went right up-stairs and knocked on her door; but, as there was no answer, I took the liberty of opening it and looking into the room. Miss Ada was lying on the bed; but it was not a natural attitude—if you understand what I mean. And then I noticed a very peculiar thing, sir. Miss Sibella's little dog was on the bed——"

"Was there a chair or stool by the bed?" interrupted Vance.

"Yes, sir, I believe there was. An ottoman."

"So the dog could have climbed on the bed unassisted?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Very good. Continue."

"Well, the dog was on the bed, and he looked like he was standing on his hind legs playing with the bell-cord. But the peculiar thing was that his hind legs were on Miss Ada's face, and she didn't seem to even notice it. Inwardly I was a bit startled; and I went to the bed and picked up the dog. Then I discovered that several threads of the silk tassel on the end of the cord had got caught between his teeth; and—would you believe it, sir?—it was him who had really rung Miss Ada's bell. . . ."

"Amazin'," murmured Vance. "What then, Sproot?"

"I shook the young lady, although I had little hope of waking her after Miss Sibella's dog had been trampling over her face without her knowing it. Then I came down-stairs and drew the curtains in the reception-room as I had been instructed to do in case of an emergency. When the doctor arrived I showed him to Miss Ada's room."

"And that's all you know?"

"Everything, sir."

"Thank you, Sproot." Markham rose impatiently. "And now you might let Doctor Drumm know that we are here."

It was the nurse, however, who came to the drawing-room a few minutes later. She was a medium-sized well-built woman of thirty-five, with shrewd brown eyes, a thin mouth and a firm chin, and a

general air of competency. She greeted Heath with a companionable wave of the hand and bowed to the rest of us with aloof formality.

"Doc Drumm can't leave his patient just now," she informed us, seating herself. "So he sent me along. He'll be down presently."

"And what's the report?" Markham was still standing.

"She'll live, I guess. We've been giving her passive exercise and artificial breathing for half an hour, and the doc hopes to have her walking before long."

Markham, his nervousness somewhat abated, sat down again.

"Tell us all you can, Miss O'Brien. Was there any evidence as to how the poison was administered?"

"Nothing but an empty bouillon cup." The woman was ill at ease. "I guess you'll find remains of morphine in it, all right."

"Why do you think the drug was given by means of the bouillon?"

She hesitated and shot Heath an uneasy look.

"It's this way. I always bring a cup of bouillon to Mrs. Greene a little before eleven in the morning; and if Miss Ada's around I bring two cups—that's the old lady's orders. This morning the girl was in the room when I went down to the kitchen, so I brought up two cups. But Mrs. Greene was alone when I returned, so I gave the old lady hers and put the other cup in Miss Ada's room on the table by the bed. Then I went into the hall to call her. She was down-stairs—in the living-room, I guess. Anyhow, she came up right away, and, as I had some mend-

ing to do for Mrs. Greene, I went to my room on the third floor. . . ."

"Therefore," interpolated Markham, "the bouillon was on Miss Ada's table unprotected for a minute or so after you had left the room and before Miss Ada came up from the lower hall."

"It wasn't over twenty seconds. And I was right outside the door all the time. Furthermore, the door was open, and I'd have heard any one in the room." The woman was obviously defending herself desperately against the imputation of negligence in Markham's remark.

Vance put the next question.

"Did you see any one else in the hall besides Miss Ada?"

"No one except Doctor Von Blon. He was in the lower hall getting into his coat when I called down."

"Did he leave the house at once?"

"Why—yes."

"You actually saw him pass through the door?"

"No-o. But he was putting on his coat, and he had said good-by to Mrs. Greene and me. . . ."

"When?"

"Not two minutes before. I'd met him coming out of Mrs. Greene's door just as I brought in the bouillon."

"And Miss Sibella's dog—did you notice it in the hall anywhere?"

"No; it wasn't around when I was there."

Vance lay back drowsily in his chair, and Markham again took up the interrogation.

"How long did you remain in your room, Miss O'Brien, after you had called Miss Ada?"

"Until the butler came and told me that Doctor Drumm wanted me."

"And how much later would you say that was?"

"About twenty minutes—maybe a little longer."

Markham smoked pensively a while.

"Yes," he commented at length; "it plainly appears that the morphine was somehow added to the bouillon.—You'd better return to Doctor Drumm now, Miss O'Brien. We'll wait here for him."

"Hell!" growled Heath, after the nurse had gone up-stairs. "She's the best woman for this sort of a job that we've got. And now she goes and falls down on it."

"I wouldn't say she'd fallen down exactly, Sergeant," dissented Vance, his eyes fixed dreamily on the ceiling. "After all, she only stepped into the hall for a few seconds to summon the young lady to her matutinal broth. And if the morphine hadn't found its way into the bouillon this morning it would have done so to-morrow, or the day after, or some time in the future. In fact, the propitious gods may actually have favored us this morning as they did the Grecian host before the walls of Troy."

"They will have favored us," observed Markham, "if Ada recovers and can tell us who visited her room before she drank the bouillon."

The silence that ensued was terminated by the entrance of Doctor Drumm, a youthful, earnest man with an aggressive bearing. He sank heavily into a chair and wiped his face with a large silk handkerchief.

"She's pulled through," he announced. "I happened to be standing by the window looking out—

sheer chance—when I saw the curtains go down—saw 'em before Hennessey* did. I grabbed up my bag and the pulmotor, and was over here in a jiffy. The butler was waiting at the door, and took me upstairs. Queer crab, that butler. The girl was lying across the bed, and it didn't take but one look to see that I wasn't dealing with strychnine. No spasms or sweating or *risus sardonicus*, you understand. Quiet and peaceful; shallow breathing; cyanosis. Morphine evidently. Then I looked at her pupils. Pin-points. No doubt now. So I sent for the nurse and got busy."

"A close call?" asked Markham.

"Close enough." The doctor nodded importantly. "You can't tell what would have happened if somebody hadn't got to her in a hurry. I figured she'd got all six grains that were lost, and gave her a good stiff hypo of atropine—a fiftieth. It reacted like a shot. Then I washed her stomach out with potassium permanganate. After that I gave her artificial respiration—she didn't seem to need it, but I wasn't taking any chances. Then the nurse and I got busy exercising her arms and legs, trying to keep her awake. Tough work, that. Hope I don't get pneumonia sweating there with the windows all open. . . . Well, so it went. Her breathing kept getting better, and I gave her another hundredth of atropine for good measure. At last I managed to get her on her feet. The nurse is walking her up and down now." He mopped his face again with a triumphant flourish of the handkerchief.

* Hennessey was the detective stationed in the Narcoss Flats to watch the Greene mansion.

"We're greatly indebted to you, doctor," said Markham. "It's quite possible you have been the means of solving this case.—When will we be able to question your patient?"

"She'll be loggy and nauseated all day—kind of general collapse, you understand, with painful breathing, drowsiness, headache, and that sort of thing—no fit condition to answer questions. But to-morrow morning you'll be able to talk to her as much as you like."

"That will be satisfactory. And what of the bouillon cup the nurse mentioned?"

"It tasted bitter—morphine, all right."

As Drumm finished speaking Sproot passed down the hall to the front door. A moment later Von Blon paused at the archway and looked into the drawing-room. The strained silence which followed the exchange of greetings caused him to study us with growing alarm.

"Has anything happened?" he finally asked.

It was Vance who rose and, with quick decision, assumed the rôle of spokesman.

"Yes, doctor. Ada has been poisoned with morphine. Doctor Drumm here happened to be in the Narcoss Flats opposite and was called in."

"And Sibella—is she all right?" Von Blon spoke excitedly.

"Oh, quite."

A relieved sigh escaped him, and he sank into a chair.

"Tell me about it. When was the—the murder discovered?"

Drumm was about to correct him when Vance said quickly:

"Immediately after you left the house this morning. The poison was administered in the bouillon the nurse brought from the kitchen."

"But . . . how could that be?" Von Blon appeared unbelieving. "I was just going when she brought the bouillon. I saw her enter with it. How could the poison——?"

"That reminds me, doctor." Vance's tone was almost dulcet. "Did you, by any hap, go up-stairs again after you had donned your coat?"

Von Blon looked at him with outraged astonishment.

"Certainly not! I left the house immediately."

"That would have been just after the nurse called down to Ada."

"Why—yes. I believe the nurse did call down; and Ada went up-stairs at once—if I recall correctly."

Vance smoked a moment, his gaze resting curiously on the doctor's troubled face.

"I would suggest, without any intention of being impertinent, that your present visit follows rather closely upon your former one."

Von Blon's face clouded over, but I failed to detect any resentment in his expression.

"Quite true," he rejoined, and shifted his eyes. "The fact is, sir, that ever since those drugs disappeared from my case I've felt that something tragic was impending, and that I was in some way to blame. Whenever I'm in this neighborhood I can't resist the impulse to call here and—and see how things are going."

"Your anxiety is wholly understandable." Vance's

tone was non-committal. Then he added negligently: "I suppose you will have no objection to Doctor Drumm continuing with Ada's case."

"Continuing?" Von Blon brought himself up straight in his chair. "I don't understand. You said a moment ago——"

"That Ada had been poisoned," finished Vance. "Quite. But d' ye see, she didn't die."

The other looked dumbfounded.

"Thank God for that!" he exclaimed, rising nervously.

"And," added Markham, "we are making no mention whatever of the episode. You will, therefore, be guided by our decision."

"Of course.—And is it permitted that I see Ada?"

Markham hesitated, and Vance answered.

"If you care to—certainly." He turned to Drumm. "Will you be so good as to accompany Doctor Von Blon?"

Drumm and Von Blon left the room together.

"I don't wonder he's on edge," commented Markham. "It's not pleasant to learn of people being poisoned with drugs lost through one's own carelessness."

"He wasn't worrying as much over Ada as he was over Sibella," remarked Heath.

"Observin' fella!" smiled Vance. "No, Sergeant; Ada's demise apparently bothered him far less than Sibella's possible state of health. . . . Now, I wonder what that means. It's an inveiglin' point. But —dash it all!—it everts my pet theory."

"So you have a theory." Markham spoke rebukingly.

"Oh, any number of 'em. And, I might add, they're all pets." Vance's lightness of tone meant merely that he was not ready to outline his suspicions; and Markham did not push the matter.

"We won't need any theories," declared Heath, "after we've heard what Ada's got to tell us. As soon as she talks to us to-morrow we'll be able to figure out who poisoned her."

"Perhaps," murmured Vance.

Drumm returned alone a few minutes later.

"Doctor Von Blon has stepped into the other girl's room. Said he'd be down right away."

"What did he have to say about your patient?" asked Vance.

"Nothing much. She put new energy into her walking the minute she saw him, though. Smiled at him, too, by Jove! A good sign, that. She'll come through fast. Lot of resistance in her."

Drumm had hardly ceased speaking when we heard Sibella's door close and the sound of descending footsteps on the stairs.

"By the by, doctor," said Vance to Von Blon as the latter re-entered the drawing-room, "have you seen Oppenheimer yet?"

"I saw him at eleven. The fact is, I went direct to him after leaving here this morning. He has agreed to make an examination to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"And was Mrs. Greene agreeable?"

"Oh, yes. I spoke to her about it this morning; and she made no objection whatever."

A short while later we took our departure. Von

Blon accompanied us to the gate, and we saw him drive off in his car.

"We'll know more by this time to-morrow, I hope," said Markham on the way down-town. He was unwontedly depressed, and his eyes were greatly troubled. "You know, Vance, I'm almost appalled by the thought of what Oppenheimer's report may be."

No report was ever made by Doctor Oppenheimer, however. At some time between one and two the next morning Mrs. Greene died in convulsions as a result of strychnine-poisoning.

CHAPTER XXI

A DEPLETED HOUSEHOLD

(Friday, December 3; forenoon)

Markham brought us the news of Mrs. Greene's death before ten o'clock the next morning. The tragedy had not been discovered until nine, when the nurse brought up her patient's morning tea. Heath had notified Markham, and Markham had stopped on his way to the Greene mansion to apprise Vance of the new development. Vance and I had already breakfasted, and we accompanied him to the house.

"This knocks out our only prop," Markham said despondently, as we sped up Madison Avenue. "The possibility that the old lady was guilty was frightful to contemplate; though all along I've been trying to console myself with the thought that she was insane. Now, however, I almost wish our suspicions had proved true, for the possibilities that are left seem even more terrible. We're dealing now with a cold-blooded calculating rationality."

Vance nodded.

"Yes, we're confronted with something far worse than mania. I can't say, though, that I'm deeply shocked by Mrs. Greene's death. She was a detestable woman, Markham—a most detestable woman. The world will not bemoan her loss."

Vance's comment expressed exactly the sentiment I had felt when Markham informed us of Mrs. Greene's death. The news had of course shaken me,

but I had no pity for the victim. She had been vicious and unnatural; she had thriven on hatred, and had made life a hell for every one about her. It was better that her existence was over.

Both Heath and Drumm were waiting for us in the drawing-room. Excitement and depression were mingled in the Sergeant's countenance, and the desperation of despair shone in his china-blue eyes. Drumm revealed only a look of professional disappointment: his chief concern apparently was that he had been deprived of an opportunity to display his medical skill.

Heath, after shaking hands absently, briefly explained the situation.

"O'Brien found the old dame dead at nine this morning, and told Sproot to wigwag to Doc Drumm. Then she phoned the Bureau, and I notified you and Doc Doremus. I got here fifteen or twenty minutes ago, and locked up the room."

"Did you inform Von Blon?" Markham asked.

"I phoned him to call off the examination he'd arranged for ten o'clock. Said I'd communicate with him later, and hung up before he had time to ask any questions."

Markham indicated his approval and turned toward Drumm.

"Give us your story, doctor."

Drumm drew himself up, cleared his throat, and assumed an attitude calculated to be impressive.

"I was down-stairs in the Narcoss dining-room eating breakfast when Hennessey came in and told me the curtains had gone down in the reception-room here. So I snatched my outfit and came over on the

run. The butler took me to the old lady's room, where the nurse was waiting. But right away I saw I was too late to be of any good. She was dead—contorted, blue, and cold—and *rigor mortis* had set in. Died of a big dose of strychnine. Probably didn't suffer much—exhaustion and coma came inside of half an hour, I'd say. Too old, you understand, to throw it off. Old people succumb to strychnine pretty swiftly. . . ."

"What about her ability to cry out and give the alarm?"

"You can't tell. The spasm may have rendered her mute. Anyway, no one heard her. Probably passed into unconsciousness after the first seizure. My experience with such cases has taught me——"

"What time would you say the strychnine was taken?"

"Well, now, you can't tell exactly." Drumm became oracular. "The convulsions may have been prolonged before death supervened, or death may have supervened very shortly after the poison was swallowed."

"At what hour, then, would you fix the time of death?"

"There again you can't say definitely. Confusion between *rigor mortis* and the phenomenon of cadaveric spasm is a pitfall into which many doctors fall. There are, however, distinct points of dissimilarity——"

"No doubt." Markham was growing impatient with Drumm's sophomoric pedantries. "But leaving all explanation to one side, what time do you think Mrs. Greene died?"

Drumm pondered the point.

"Roughly, let us say, at two this morning."

"And the strychnine might have been taken as early as eleven or twelve?"

"It's possible."

"Anyhow, we'll know about it when Doc Doremus gets here," asserted Heath with brutal frankness. He was in vicious mood that morning.

"Did you find any glass or cup by which the drug might have been administered, doctor?" Markham hastened to ask, by way of covering up Heath's remark.

"There was a glass near the bed with what appeared to be sulphate crystals adhering to the sides of it."

"But wouldn't a fatal dose of strychnine make an ordin'ry drink noticeably bitter?" Vance had suddenly become alert.

"Undoubtedly. But there was a bottle of citrocarbonate—a well-known antacid—on the night-table; and if the drug had been taken with this, the taste would not have been detected. Citrocarbonate is slightly saline and highly effervescing."

"Could Mrs. Greene have taken the citrocarbonate alone?"

"It's not likely. It has to be carefully mixed with water, and the operation would be highly awkward for any one in bed."

"Now, that's most interestin'." Vance listlessly lighted a cigarette. "We may presume, therefore, that the person who gave Mrs. Greene the citrocarbonate also administered the strychnine." He turned to Markham. "I think Miss O'Brien might be able to help us."

Heath went at once and summoned the nurse.

But her evidence was unilluminating. She had left Mrs. Greene reading about eleven o'clock, had gone to her own room to make her toilet for the night, and had returned to Ada's room half an hour later, where she had slept all night, according to Heath's instructions. She had risen at eight, dressed, and gone to the kitchen to fetch Mrs. Greene's tea. As far as she knew, Mrs. Greene had drunk nothing before retiring—certainly she had taken no citrocarbonate up to eleven o'clock. Furthermore, Mrs. Greene never attempted to take it alone.

"You think, then," asked Vance, "that it was given to her by some one else?"

"You can bank on it," the nurse assured him bluntly. "If she'd wanted it, she'd have raised the house before mixing it herself."

"It's quite obvious," Vance observed to Markham, "that some one entered her room after eleven o'clock and prepared the citrocarbonate."

Markham got up and walked anxiously about the room.

"Our immediate problem boils down to finding out who had the opportunity to do it," he said. "You, Miss O'Brien, may return to your room. . . ." Then he went to the bell-cord and rang for Sproot.

During a brief interrogation of the butler the following facts were brought out:

The house had been locked up, and Sproot had retired, at about half past ten.

Sibella had gone to her room immediately after dinner, and had remained there.

Hemming and the cook had lingered in the kitchen until

shortly after eleven, at which time Sproot had heard them ascend to their rooms.

The first intimation Sproot had of Mrs. Greene's death was when the nurse sent him to draw the reception-room shades at nine that morning.

Markham dismissed him and sent for the cook. She was, it appeared, unaware of Mrs. Greene's death and of Ada's poisoning as well; and what evidence she had to give was of no importance. She had, she said, been in the kitchen or in her own room practically all of the preceding day.

Hemming was interviewed next. From the nature of the questions put to her she became suspicious almost at once. Her piercing eyes narrowed, and she gave us a look of shrewd triumph.

"You can't hoodwink me," she burst out. "The Lord's been busy with his besom again. And a good thing, too! 'The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked shall he destroy.'"

"'Will,'" corrected Vance. "And seeing that you have been so tenderly preserved, perhaps we had better inform you that both Miss Ada and Mrs. Greene have been poisoned."

He was watching the woman closely, but it took no scrutiny to see her cheeks go pale and her jaw sag. The Lord had evidently been too precipitously devastating even for this devout disciple; and her faith was insufficient to counteract her fear.

"I'm going to leave this house," she declared faintly. "I've seen enough to bear witness for the Lord."

"An excellent idea," nodded Vance. "And the

sooner you go the more time you'll have to give apocryphal testimony."

Hemming rose, a bit dazed, and started for the archway. Then she quickly turned back and glared at Markham maliciously.

"But let me tell you something before I pass from this den of iniquity. That Miss Sibella is the worst of the lot, and the Lord is going to strike her down next—mark my words! There's no use to try and save her. She's—*doomed!*"

Vance lifted his eyebrows languidly.

"I say, Hemming, what unrighteousness has Miss Sibella been up to now?"

"The usual thing." The woman spoke with relish. "She's nothing but a hussy, if you ask me. Her carryings-on with this Doctor Von Blon have been scandalous. They're together, as thick as thieves, at all hours." She nodded her head significantly. "He came here again last night and went to her room. There's no telling what time he left."

"Fancy that, now. And how do you happen to know about it?"

"Didn't I let him in?"

"Oh, you did?—What time was this? And where was Sproot?"

"Mr. Sproot was eating his dinner, and I'd gone to the front door to take a look at the weather when the doctor walks up. 'Howdy-do, Hemming?' he says with his oily smile. And he brushes past me, nervous-like, and goes straight to Miss Sibella's room."

"Perhaps Miss Sibella was indisposed, and sent for him," suggested Vance indifferently.

"Huh!" Hemming tossed her head contemptuously, and strode from the room.

Vance rose at once and rang again for Sproot.

"Did you know Doctor Von Blon was here last night?" he asked when the butler appeared.

The man shook his head.

"No, sir. I was quite unaware of the fact."

"That's all, Sproot. And now please tell Miss Sibella we'd like to see her."

"Yes, sir."

It was fifteen minutes before Sibella put in an appearance.

"I'm beastly lazy these days," she explained, settling herself in a large chair. "What's the party for this morning?"

Vance offered her a cigarette with an air half quizzical and half deferential.

"Before we explain our presence," he said, "please be good enough to tell us what time Doctor Von Blon left here last night?"

"At a quarter of eleven," she answered, a hostile challenge coming into her eyes.

"Thank you. And now I may tell you that both your mother and Ada have been poisoned."

"Mother and Ada poisoned?" She echoed the words vaguely, as if they were only half intelligible to her; and for several moments she sat motionless, staring stonily out of flintlike eyes. Slowly her gaze became fixed on Markham.

"I think I'll take your advice," she said. "I have a girl chum in Atlantic City. . . . This place is really becoming too, too creepy." She forced a faint smile. "I'm off for the seashore this after-

noon." For the first time the girl's nerve seemed to have deserted her.

"Your decision is very wise," observed Vance. "Go, by all means; and arrange to stay until we have settled this affair."

She looked at him in a spirit of indulgent irony.

"I'm afraid I can't stay so long," she said; then added: "I suppose mother and Ada are both dead."

"Only your mother," Vance told her. "Ada recovered."

"She would!" Every curve of her features expressed a fine arrogant contempt. "Common clay has great resistance, I've heard. You know, I'm the only one standing between her and the Greene millions now."

"Your sister had a very close call," Markham reprimanded her. "If we had not had a doctor on guard, you might now be the sole remaining heir to those millions."

"And that would look frightfully suspicious, wouldn't it?" Her question was disconcertingly frank. "But you may rest assured that if *I* had planned this affair, little Ada would not have recovered."

Before Markham could answer she switched herself out of the chair.

"Now, I'm going to pack. Enough is enough."

When she had left the room, Heath looked with doubtful inquisitiveness at Markham.

"What about it, sir? Are you going to let her leave the city? She's the only one of the Greenes who hasn't been touched."

We knew what he meant; and this spoken sugges-

tion of the thought that had been passing through all our minds left us silent for a moment.

"We can't take the chance of forcing her to stay here," Markham returned finally. "If anything should happen . . ."

"I get you, sir." Heath was on his feet. "But I'm going to see that she's tailed—believe me! I'll get two good men up here who'll stick to her from the time she goes out that front door till we know where we stand." He went into the hall, and we heard him giving orders to Snitkin over the telephone.

Five minutes later Doctor Doremus arrived. He was no longer jaunty, and his greeting was almost sombre. Accompanied by Drumm and Heath he went at once to Mrs. Greene's room, while Markham and Vance and I waited down-stairs. When he returned at the end of fifteen minutes he was markedly subdued, and I noticed he did not put on his hat at its usual rakish angle.

"What's the report?" Markham asked him.

"Same as Drumm's. The old girl passed out, I'd say, between one and two."

"And the strychnine was taken when?"

"Midnight, or thereabouts. But that's only a guess. Anyway, she got it along with the citrocarbonate. I tasted it on the glass."*

"By the by, doctor," said Vance, "when you do the autopsy can you let us have a report on the state of atrophy of the leg muscles?"

* It will be remembered that in the famous Molineux poisoning case the cyanide of mercury was administered by way of a similar drug—to wit: Bromo-Seltzer.

"Sure thing." Doremus was somewhat surprised by the request.

When he had gone, Markham addressed himself to Drumm.

"We'd like to talk to Ada now. How is she this morning?"

"Oh, fine!" Drumm spoke with pride. "I saw her right after I'd looked at the old lady. She's weak and a bit dried up with all the atropine I gave her, but otherwise practically normal."

"And she has not been told of her mother's death?"

"Not a word."

"She will have to know," interposed Vance; "and there's no point in keeping the fact from her any longer. It's just as well that the shock should come when we're all present."

Ada was sitting by the window when we came in, her elbows on the sill, chin in hands, gazing out into the snow-covered yard. She was startled by our entry, and the pupils of her eyes dilated, as if with sudden fright. It was plain that the experiences she had been through had created in her a state of nervous fear.

After a brief exchange of amenities, during which both Vance and Markham strove to allay her nervousness, Markham broached the subject of the bouillon.

"We'd give a great deal," he said, "not to have to recall so painful an episode, but much depends on what you can tell us regarding yesterday morning. —You were in the drawing-room, weren't you, when the nurse called down to you?"

The girl's lips and tongue were dry, and she spoke with some difficulty.

"Yes. Mother had asked me to bring her a copy of a magazine, and I had just gone down-stairs to look for it when the nurse called."

"You saw the nurse when you came up-stairs?"

"Yes; she was just going toward the servants' stairway."

"There was no one in your room here when you entered?"

She shook her head. "Who could have been here?"

"That's what we're trying to find out, Miss Greene," replied Markham gravely. "Some one certainly put the drug in your bouillon."

She shuddered, but made no reply.

"Did any one come in to see you later?" Markham continued.

"Not a soul."

Heath impatiently projected himself into the interrogation.

"And say; did you drink your soup right away?"

"No—not right away. I felt a little chilly, and I went across the hall to Julia's room to get an old Spanish shawl to put round me."

Heath made a disgusted face, and sighed noisily.

"Every time we get going on this case," he complained, "something comes along and sinks us.—If Miss Ada left the soup in here, Mr. Markham, while she went to get a shawl, then almost anybody coulda sneaked in and poisoned the stuff."

"I'm so sorry," Ada apologized, almost as though

she had taken Heath's words as a criticism of her actions.

"It's not your fault, Ada," Vance assured her. "The Sergeant is unduly depressed.—But tell me this: when you went into the hall did you see Miss Sibella's dog anywhere around?"

She shook her head wonderingly.

"Why, no. What has Sibella's dog to do with it?"

"He probably saved your life." And Vance explained to her how Sproot had happened to find her.

She gave a half-breathless murmur of amazement and incredulity, and fell into abstracted revery.

"When you returned from your sister's room, did you drink your bouillon at once?" Vance asked her next.

With difficulty she brought her mind back to the question.

"Yes."

"And didn't you notice a peculiar taste?"

"Not particularly. Mother always likes a lot of salt in her bouillon."

"And then what happened?"

"Nothing happened. Only, I began to feel funny. The back of my neck tightened up, and I got very warm and drowsy. My skin tingled all over, and my arms and legs seemed to get numb. I was terribly sleepy, and I lay back on the bed.—That's all I remember."

"Another washout," grumbled Heath.

There was a short silence, and Vance drew his chair nearer.

"Now, Ada," he said, "you must brace yourself for more bad news. . . . Your mother died during the night."

The girl sat motionless for a moment, and then turned to him eyes of a despairing clearness.

"Died?" she repeated. "How did she die?"

"She was poisoned—she took an overdose of strychnine."

"You mean . . . she committed suicide?"

This query startled us all. It expressed a possibility that had not occurred to us. After a momentary hesitation, however, Vance slowly shook his head.

"No, I hardly think so. I'm afraid the person who poisoned you also poisoned your mother."

Vance's reply seemed to stun her. Her face grew pale, and her eyes were set in a glassy stare of terror. Then presently she sighed deeply, as if from a kind of mental depletion.

"Oh, what's going to happen next? . . . I'm—afraid!"

"Nothing more is going to happen," said Vance with emphasis. "Nothing more *can* happen. You are going to be guarded every minute. And Sibella is going this afternoon to Atlantic City for a long visit."

"I wish I could go away," she breathed pathetically.

"There will be no need of that," put in Markham. "You'll be safer in New York. We are going to keep the nurse here to look after you, and also put a man in the house day and night until every-

thing is straightened out. Hemming is leaving today, but Sproot and the cook will take care of you." He rose and patted her shoulder comfortingly. "There's no possible way any one can harm you now."

As we descended into the lower hall Sproot was just admitting Doctor Von Blon.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, hastening toward us. "Sibella just phoned me about Mrs. Greene." He looked truculently at Markham, his suavity for the moment forgotten. "Why wasn't I informed, sir?"

"I saw no necessity of bothering you, doctor," Markham returned equably. "Mrs. Greene had been dead several hours when she was found. And we had our own doctor at hand."

A quick flame leaped in Von Blon's eyes.

"And am I to be forcibly kept from seeing Sibella?" he asked coldly. "She tells me she is leaving the city to-day, and has asked me to assist with her arrangements."

Markham stepped aside.

"You are free, doctor, to do whatever you desire," he said, a perceptible chill in his voice.

Von Blon bowed stiffly, and went up the stairs.

"He's sore," grinned Heath.

"No, Sergeant," Vance corrected. "He's worried —oh, deuced worried."

Shortly after noon that day Hemming departed forever from the Greene mansion; and Sibella took the three-fifteen o'clock train for Atlantic City. Of the original household, only Ada and Sproot and Mrs. Mannheim were left. However, Heath gave

orders for Miss O'Brien to remain on duty indefinitely and keep an eye on everything that happened; and, in addition to this protection, a detective was stationed in the house to augment the nurse's watch.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

(Friday, December 3; 6 p. m.)

At six o'clock that evening Markham called another informal conference at the Stuyvesant Club. Not only were Inspector Moran and Heath present, but Chief Inspector O'Brien* dropped in on his way home from the office.

The afternoon papers had been merciless in their criticism of the police for its unsuccessful handling of the investigation. Markham, after consulting with Heath and Doremus, had explained the death of Mrs. Greene to the reporters as "the result of an overdose of strychnine—a stimulant she had been taking regularly under her physician's orders." Swacker had typed copies of the item so there would be no mistake as to its exact wording; and the announcement ended by saying: "There is no evidence to show that the drug was not self-administered as the result of error." But although the reporters composed their news stories in strict accord with Markham's report, they interpolated subtle intimations of deliberate murder, so that the reader was left with little doubt as to the true state of affairs. The unsuccessful attempt to poison Ada had been kept a strict official secret. But this suppressed

* Chief Inspector O'Brien, who was in command of the entire Police Department, was, I learned later, an uncle of the Miss O'Brien who was acting officially as nurse at the Greene mansion.

item had not been needed to inflame the public's morbid imagination to an almost unprecedented degree.

Both Markham and Heath had begun to show the strain of their futile efforts to solve the affair; and one glance at Inspector Moran, as he sank heavily into a chair beside the District Attorney, was enough to make one realize that a corroding worry had undermined his habitual equanimity. Even Vance revealed signs of tensity and uneasiness; but with him it was an eager alertness, rather than worry, that marked any deviation from normality in his attitude.

As soon as we were assembled that evening Heath briefly epitomized the case. He went over the various lines of investigation, and enumerated the precautions that had been taken. When he had finished, and before any one could make a comment, he turned to Chief Inspector O'Brien and said:

"There's plenty of things, sir, we might've done in any ordinary case. We could've searched the house for the gun and the poison like the narcotic squad goes through a single room or small apartment—punching the mattresses, tearing up the carpets, and sounding the woodwork—but in the Greene house it would've taken a coupla months. And even if we'd found the stuff, what good would it have done us? The guy that's tearing things wide open in that dump isn't going to stop just because we take his dinky thirty-two away from him, or grab his poison.—After Chester or Rex was shot we could've arrested all the rest of the family and put 'em through a third degree. But there's too much noise in the papers now every time we give anybody the

works; and it ain't exactly healthy for us to grill a family like the Greenes. They've got too much money and pull; they'd have had a whole battalion of high-class lawyers smearing us with suits and injunctions and God knows what. And if we'd just held 'em as material witnesses, they'd have got out in forty-eight hours on *habeas-corpus* actions.—Then, again, we might've planted a bunch of huskies in the house. But we couldn't keep a garrison there indefinitely, and the minute they'd have been called off, the dirty work would've begun.—Believe me, Inspector, we've been up against it good and plenty."

O'Brien grunted and tugged at his white cropped moustache.

"What the Sergeant says is perfectly true," Moran remarked. "Most of the ordinary methods of action and investigation have been denied us. We're obviously dealing with an inside family affair."

"Moreover," added Vance, "we're dealing with an extr'ordin'rily clever plot—something that has been thought out and planned down to the minutest detail, and elaborately covered up at every point. Everything has been staked—even life itself—on the outcome. Only a supreme hatred and an exalted hope could have inspired the crimes. And against such attributes, d' ye see, the ordin'ry means of prevention are utterly useless."

"A family affair!" repeated O'Brien heavily, who apparently was still pondering over Inspector Moran's statement. "It don't look to me as though there's much of the family left. I'd say, on the evidence, that some outsider was trying to wipe the

family out." He gave Heath a glowering look. "What have you done about the servants? You're not scared to monkey with *them*, are you? You could have arrested one of 'em a long time ago and stopped the yapping of the newspapers for a time, anyway."

Markham came immediately to Heath's defense. "I'm wholly responsible for any seeming negligence on the Sergeant's part in that regard," he said with a noticeable accent of cold reproach. "As long as I have anything to say about this case no arrests are going to be made for the mere purpose of quieting unpleasant criticism." Then his manner relaxed slightly. "There isn't the remotest indication of guilt in connection with any of the servants. The maid Hemming is a harmless fanatic, and is quite incapable mentally of having planned the murders. I permitted her to leave the Greenes' to-day. . . ."

"We know where to find her, Inspector," Heath hastened to add by way of forestalling the other's inevitable question.

"As to the cook," Markham went on; "she, too, is wholly outside of any serious consideration. She's temperamentally unfitted to be cast in the rôle of murderer."

"And what about the butler?" asked O'Brien acrimoniously.

"He's been with the family thirty years, and was even remembered liberally in Tobias Greene's will. He's a bit queer, but I think if he had had any reason for destroying the Greenes he wouldn't have waited till old age came on him." Markham looked

troubled for a moment. "I must admit, however, that there's an atmosphere of mysterious reserve about the old fellow. He always gives me the impression of knowing far more than he admits."

"What you say, Markham, is true enough," remarked Vance. "But Sproot certainly doesn't fit this particular saturnalia of crime. He reasons too carefully; there's an immense cautiousness about the man, and his mental outlook is highly conservative. He might stab an enemy if there was no remote chance of detection. But he lacks the courage and the imaginative resiliency that have made possible this present gory debauch. He's too old—much too old. . . . *By Jove!*"

Vance leaned over and tapped the table with an incisive gesture.

"That's the thing that's been evading me! Vitality! That's what is at the bottom of this business—a tremendous, elastic, self-confident vitality: a supreme ruthlessness mingled with audacity and impudence—an intrepid and reckless egoism—an undaunted belief in one's own ability. And they're not the components of age. There's youth in all this—youth with its ambition and venturesomeness—that doesn't count the cost, that takes no thought of risk. . . . No. Sproot could never qualify."

Moran shifted his chair uneasily, and turned to Heath.

"Whom did you send to Atlantic City to watch Sibella?"

"Guilfoyle and Mallory—the two best men we've got."* The Sergeant smiled with a kind of cruel

* I recalled that Guilfoyle and Mallory were the two men who had been set to watch Tony Skeel in the Canary murder case.

satisfaction. "She won't get away. And she won't pull anything, either."

"And have you extended your attention to Doctor Von Blon, by any chance?" negligently asked Vance.

Again Heath's canny smile appeared.

"He's been tailed ever since Rex was shot."

Vance regarded him admiringly.

"I'm becoming positively fond of you, Sergeant," he said; and beneath his chaffing note was the ring of sincerity.

O'Brien leaned ponderously over the table and, brushing the ashes from his cigar, fixed a sullen look on the District Attorney.

"What was this story you gave out to the papers, Mr. Markham? You seemed to want to imply that the old woman took the strychnine herself. Was that hogwash, or was there something in it?"

"I'm afraid there was nothing in it, Inspector." Markham spoke with a sense of genuine regret. "Such a theory doesn't square with the poisoning of Ada—or with any of the rest of it, for that matter."

"I'm not so sure," retorted O'Brien. "Moran here has told me that you fellows had an idea the old woman was faking her paralysis." He rearranged his arms on the table and pointed a short thick finger at Markham. "Supposing she shot three of the children, using up all the cartridges in the revolver, and then stole the two doses of poison —one for each of the two girls left; and then supposing she gave the morphine to the younger one, and had only one dose left. . . ." He paused and squinted significantly.

"I see what you mean," said Markham. "Your

theory is that she didn't count on our having a doctor handy to save Ada's life, and that, having failed to put Ada out of the way, she figured the game was up, and took the strychnine."

"That's it!" O'Brien struck the table with his fist. "And it makes sense. Furthermore, it means we've cleared up the case—see?"

"Yes, it unquestionably makes sense." It was Vance's quiet, drawling voice that answered. "But forgive me if I suggest that it fits the facts much too tidily. It's a perfect theory, don't y' know; it leaps to the brain, almost as though some one had planned it for our benefit. I rather fancy that we're intended to adopt that very logical and sensible point of view. But really now, Inspector, Mrs. Greene was not the suicidal type, however murderous she may have been."

While Vance had been speaking, Heath had left the room. A few minutes later he returned and interrupted O'Brien in a long, ill-natured defense of his suicide theory.

"We haven't got to argue any more along that line," he announced. "I've just had Doc Doremus on the phone. He's finished the autopsy; and he says that the old lady's leg muscles had wasted away—gone plumb flabby—and that there wasn't a chance in the world of her moving her legs, let alone walking on 'em."

"Good God!" Moran was the first to recover from the amazement this news had caused us. "Who was it, then, that Ada saw in the hall?"

"That's just it!" Vance spoke hurriedly, trying to stem his rising sense of excitation. "If only we

knew! That's the answer to the whole problem. It may not have been the murderer; but the person who sat in that library night after night and read strange books by candlelight is the key to everything. . . ."

"But Ada was so positive in her identification," objected Markham, in a bewildered tone.

"She's hardly to be blamed in the circumstances," Vance returned. "The child had been through a frightful experience and was scarcely normal. And it is not at all unlikely that she, too, suspected her mother. If she did, what would have been more natural than for her to imagine that this shadowy figure she saw in the hall long after midnight was the actual object of her dread? It is not unusual for a person under the stress of fright to distort an object by the projection of a dominating mental image."

"You mean," said Heath, "that she saw somebody else, and imagined it was her mother because she was thinking so hard of the old woman?"

"It's by no means improbable."

"Still, there was that detail of the Oriental shawl," objected Markham. "Ada might easily have mistaken the person's features, but her insistence on having seen that particular shawl was fairly definite."

Vance gave a perplexed nod.

"The point is well taken. And it may prove the Ariadne's clew that will lead us out of this Cretan labyrinth. We must find out more about that shawl."

Heath had taken out his note-book and was turning the pages with scowling concentration.

"And don't forget, Mr. Vance," he said, without looking up, "about that diagram Ada found in the rear of the hall near the library door. Maybe this person in the shawl was the one who'd dropped it, and was going to the library to look for it, but got scared off when she saw Ada."

"But whoever shot Rex," said Markham, "evidently stole the paper from him, and therefore wouldn't be worrying about it."

"I guess that's right," Heath admitted reluctantly.

"Such speculation is futile," commented Vance. "This affair is too complicated to be untangled by the unravelling of details. We must determine, if possible, who it was that Ada saw that night. Then we'll have opened a main artery of inquiry."

"How are we going to find that out," demanded O'Brien, "when Ada was the only person who saw this woman in Mrs. Greene's shawl?"

"Your question contains the answer, Inspector. We must see Ada again and try to counteract the suggestion of her own fears. When we explain that it couldn't have been her mother, she may recall some other point that will put us on the right track."

And this was the course taken. When the conference ended, O'Brien departed, and the rest of us dined at the club. At half past eight we were on our way to the Greene mansion.

We found Ada and the cook alone in the drawing-room. The girl sat before the fire, a copy of Grimm's "Fairy-Tales" turned face down on her knees; and Mrs. Mannheim, busy with a lapful of mending, occupied a straight chair near the door.

It was a curious sight, in view of the formal correctness of the house, and it brought forcibly to my mind how fear and adversity inevitably level all social standards.

When we entered the room Mrs. Mannheim rose and, gathering up her mending, started to go. But Vance indicated that she was to remain, and without a word she resumed her seat.

"We're here to annoy you again, Ada," said Vance, assuming the rôle of interrogator. "But you're about the only person we can come to for help." His smile put the girl at ease, and he continued gently: "We want to talk to you about what you told us the other afternoon. . . ."

Her eyes opened wide, and she waited in a kind of awed silence.

"You told us you thought you had seen your mother——"

"I did see her—I did!"

Vance shook his head. "No; it was not your mother. She was unable to walk, Ada. She was truly and helplessly paralyzed. It was impossible for her even to make the slightest movement with either leg."

"But—I don't understand." There was more than bewilderment in her voice: there was terror and alarm such as one might experience at the thought of supernatural malignancy. "I heard Doctor Von tell mother he was bringing a specialist to see her this morning. But she died last night—so how could you know? Oh, you must be mistaken. I saw her—I *know* I saw her."

She seemed to be battling desperately for the

preservation of her sanity. But Vance again shook his head.

"Doctor Oppenheimer did not examine your mother," he said. "But Doctor Doremus did—today. And he found that she had been unable to move for many years."

"Oh!" The exclamation was only breathed. The girl seemed incapable of speech.

"And what we've come for," continued Vance, "is to ask you to recall that night, and see if you cannot remember something—some little thing—that will help us. You saw this person only by the flickering light of a match. You might easily have made a mistake."

"But how could I? I was so close to her."

"Before you woke up that night and felt hungry, had you been dreaming of your mother?"

She hesitated, and shuddered slightly.

"I don't know, but I've dreamed of mother constantly—awful, scary dreams—ever since that first night when somebody came into my room. . . ."

"That may account for the mistake you made." Vance paused a moment and then asked: "Do you distinctly remember seeing your mother's Oriental shawl on the person in the hall that night?"

"Oh, yes," she said, after a slight hesitation. "It was the first thing I noticed. Then I saw her face. . . ."

A trivial but startling thing happened at this moment. We had our back to Mrs. Mannheim and, for the time being, had forgotten her presence in the room. Suddenly what sounded like a dry sob broke from her, and the sewing-basket on her knees fell

to the floor. Instinctively we turned. The woman was staring at us glassily.

"What difference does it make who she saw?" she asked in a dead, monotonous voice. "She maybe saw me."

"Nonsense, Gertrude," Ada said quickly. "It wasn't you."

Vance was watching the woman with a puzzled expression.

"Do you ever wear Mrs. Greene's shawl, Frau Mannheim?"

"Of course she doesn't," Ada cut in.

"And do you ever steal into the library and read after the household is asleep?" pursued Vance.

The woman picked up her sewing morosely, and again lapsed into sullen silence. Vance studied her a moment and then turned back to Ada.

"Do you know of any one who might have been wearing your mother's shawl that night?"

"I—don't know," the girl stammered, her lips trembling.

"Come; that won't do." Vance spoke with some asperity. "This isn't the time to shield any one. Who was in the habit of using the shawl?"

"No one was in the habit. . . ." She stopped and gave Vance a pleading look; but he was obdurate.

"Who, then, besides your mother ever wore it?"

"But I would have known if it had been Sibella I saw——"

"Sibella? She sometimes borrowed the shawl?"

Ada nodded reluctantly. "Once in a great while.

She—she admired the shawl. . . . Oh, why do you make me tell you this!"

"And you have never seen any one else with it on?"

"No; no one ever wore it except mother and Sibella."

Vance attempted to banish her obvious distress with a whimsical reassuring smile.

"Just see how foolish all your fears have been," he said lightly. "You probably saw your sister in the hall that night, and, because you'd been having bad dreams about your mother, you thought it was she. As a result, you became frightened, and locked yourself up and worried. It was rather silly, what?"

A little later we took our leave.

"It has always been my contention," remarked Inspector Moran, as we rode down-town, "that any identification under strain or excitement is worthless. And here we have a glaring instance of it."

"I'd like a nice quiet little chat with Sibella," mumbled Heath, busy with his own thoughts.

"It wouldn't comfort you, Sergeant," Vance told him. "At the end of your *tête-à-tête* you'd know only what the young lady wanted you to know."

"Where do we stand now?" asked Markham, after a silence.

"Exactly where we stood before," answered Vance dejectedly, "—in the midst of an impenetrable fog. —And I'm not in the least convinced," he added, "that it was Sibella whom Ada saw in the hall."

Markham looked amazed.

"Then who, in Heaven's name, was it?"

Vance sighed gloomily. "Give me the answer to that one question, and I'll complete the saga."

That night Vance sat up until nearly two o'clock writing at his desk in the library.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MISSING FACT

(Saturday, December 4; 1 p. m.)

Saturday was the District Attorney's "half-day" at the office, and Markham had invited Vance and me to lunch at the Bankers Club. But when we reached the Criminal Courts Building he was swamped with an accumulation of work, and we had a tray-service meal in his private conference room. Before leaving the house that noon Vance had put several sheets of closely written paper in his pocket, and I surmised—correctly, as it turned out—that they were what he had been working on the night before.

When lunch was over Vance lay back in his chair languidly and lit a cigarette.

"Markham old dear," he said, "I accepted your invitation to-day for the sole purpose of discussing art. I trust you are in a receptive mood."

Markham looked at him with frank annoyance.

"Damn it, Vance, I'm too confounded busy to be bothered with your irrelevancies. If you feel artistically inclined, take Van here to the Metropolitan Museum. But leave me alone."

Vance sighed, and wagged his head reproachfully.

"There speaks the voice of America! 'Run along and play with your æsthetic toys if such silly things amuse you; but let me attend to my serious affairs.' It's very sad. In the present instance, however, I

refuse to run along; and most certainly I shall not browse about that mausoleum of Europe's rejected corpses, known as the Metropolitan Museum. I say, it's a wonder you didn't suggest that I make the rounds of our municipal statuary."

"I'd have suggested the Aquarium——"

"I know. Anything to get rid of me." Vance adopted an injured tone. "And yet, don't y' know, I'm going to sit right here and deliver an edifying lecture on æsthetic composition."

"Then don't talk too loud," said Markham, rising; "for I'll be in the next room working."

"But my lecture has to do with the Greene case. And really you shouldn't miss it."

Markham paused and turned.

"Merely one of your wordy prologues, eh?" He sat down again. "Well, if you have any helpful suggestions to make, I'll listen."

Vance smoked a moment.

"Y' know, Markham," he began, assuming a lazy, unemotional air, "there's a fundamental difference between a good painting and a photograph. I'll admit many painters appear unaware of this fact; and when color photography is perfected—my word! what a horde of academicians will be thrown out of employment! But none the less there's a vast chasm between the two; and it's this technical distinction that's to be the burden of my lay. How, for instance, does Michelangelo's 'Moses' differ from a camera study of a patriarchal old man with whiskers and a stone tablet? Wherein lie the points of divergence between Rubens's 'Landscape with Château de Stein' and a tourist's snap-shot of a Rhine castle? Why

is a Cézanne still-life an improvement on a photograph of a dish of apples? Why have the Renaissance paintings of Madonnas endured for hundreds of years whereas a mere photograph of a mother and child passes into artistic oblivion at the very click of the lens shutter? . . ."

He held up a silencing hand as Markham was about to speak.

"I'm not being futile. Bear with me a moment.—The difference between a good painting and a photograph is this: the one is arranged, composed, organized; the other is merely the haphazard impression of a scene, or a segment of realism, just as it exists in nature. In short, the one has form; the other is chaotic. When a true artist paints a picture, d' ye see, he arranges all the masses and lines to accord with his preconceived idea of composition —that is, he bends everything in the picture to a basic design; and he also eliminates any objects or details that go contr'ry to, or detract from, that design. Thus he achieves a homogeneity of form, so to speak. Every object in the picture is put there for a definite purpose, and is set in a certain position to accord with the underlying structural pattern. There are no irrelevancies, no unrelated details, no detached objects, no arbitr'ry arrangement of values. All the forms and lines are interdependent; every object—indeed, every brush stroke—takes its exact place in the pattern and fulfils a given function. The picture, in fine, is a unity."

"Very instructive," commented Markham, glancing ostentatiously at his watch. "And the Greene case?"

"Now, a photograph, on the other hand," pursued Vance, ignoring the interruption, "is devoid of design or even of arrangement in the æsthetic sense. To be sure, a photographer may pose and drape a figure—he may even saw off the limb of a tree that he intends to record on his negative; but it's quite impossible for him to compose the subject-matter of his picture to accord with a preconceived design, the way a painter does. In a photograph there are always details that have no meaning, variations of light and shade that are harmonically false, textures that create false notes, lines that are discords, masses that are out of place. The camera, d' ye see, is deucedly forthright—it records whatever is before it, irrespective of art values. The inevitable result is that a photograph lacks organization and unity; its composition is, at best, primitive and obvious. And it is full of irrelevant factors—of objects which have neither meaning nor purpose. There is no uniformity of conception in it. It is haphazard, heterogeneous, aimless, and amorphous—just as is nature."

"You needn't belabor the point." Markham spoke impatiently. "I have a rudimentary intelligence.—Where is this elaborate truism leading you?"

Vance gave him an engaging smile.

"To East 53d Street. But before we reach our destination permit me another brief amplification. —Quite often a painting of intricate and subtle design does not at once reveal its composition to the spectator. In fact, only the designs of the simpler and more obvious paintings are immediately grasped. Generally the spectator has to study a painting care-

fully—trace its rhythms, compare its forms, weigh its details, and fit together all its salients—before its underlying design becomes apparent. Many well-organized and perfectly balanced paintings—such as Renoir's figure-pieces, Matisse's interiors, Cézanne's water-colors, Picasso's still-lives, and Leonardo's anatomical drawings—may at first appear meaningless from the standpoint of composition; their forms may seem to lack unity and cohesion; their masses and linear values may give the impression of having been arbitrarily put down. And it is only after the spectator has related all their integers and traced all their contrapuntal activities that they take on significance and reveal their creator's motivating conception. . . ."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Markham. "Paintings and photographs differ; the objects in a painting possess design; the objects in a photograph are without design; one must often study a painting in order to determine the design.—That, I believe, covers the ground you have been wandering over desultorily for the past fifteen minutes."

"I was merely trying to imitate the vast deluge of repetitive verbiage found in legal documents," explained Vance. "I hoped thereby to convey my meaning to your lawyer's mind."

"You succeeded with a vengeance," snapped Markham. "What follows?"

Vance became serious again.

"Markham, we've been looking at the various occurrences in the Greene case as though they were the unrelated objects of a photograph. We've inspected each fact as it came up; but we have failed to analyze

sufficiently its connection with all the other known facts. We've regarded this whole affair as though it were a series, or collection, of isolated integers. And we've missed the significance of everything because we haven't yet determined the shape of the basic pattern of which each of these incidents is but a part.—Do you follow me?"

"My dear fellow!"

"Very well.—Now, it goes without saying that there is a design at the bottom of this whole amazin' business. Nothing has happened haphazardly. There has been premeditation behind each act—a subtly and carefully concocted composition, as it were. And everything has emanated from that central shape. Everything has been fashioned by a fundamental structural idea. Therefore, nothing important that has occurred since the first double shooting has been unrelated to the predetermined pattern of the crime. All the aspects and events of the case, taken together, form a unity—a co-ordinated, interactive whole. In short, the Greene case is a painting, not a photograph. And when we have studied it in that light—when we have determined the interrelationship of all the external factors, and have traced the visual forms to their generating lines—then, Markham, we will know the composition of the picture; we will see the design on which the perverted painter has erected his document'ry material. And once we have discovered the underlying shape of this hideous picture's pattern, we'll know its creator."

"I see your point," said Markham slowly. "But how does it help us? We know all the external facts;

and they certainly don't fit into any intelligible conception of a unified whole."

"Not yet, perhaps," agreed Vance. "But that's because we haven't gone about it systematically. We've done too much investigating and too little thinking. We've been sidetracked by what the modern painters call documentation—that is, by the objective appeal of the picture's recognizable parts. We haven't sought for the abstract content. We've overlooked the 'significant form'—a loose phrase; but blame Clive Bell for it."*

"And how would you suggest that we set about determining the compositional design of this bloody canvas? We might dub the picture, by the way, 'Nepotism Gone Wrong.'" By this facetious remark, he was, I knew, attempting to counteract the serious impression the other's disquisition had made on him; for, though he realized Vance would not have drawn his voluminous parallel without a definite hope of applying it successfully to the problem in hand, he was chary of indulging any expectations lest they result in further disappointments.

In answer to Markham's question Vance drew out the sheaf of papers he had brought with him.

"Last night," he explained, "I set down briefly and chronologically all the outstanding facts of the Greene case—that is, I noted each important external factor of the ghastly picture we've been contemplating for the past few weeks. The principal

* Vance was here referring to the chapter called "The Æsthetic Hypothesis" in Clive Bell's "Art." But, despite the somewhat slighting character of his remark, Vance was an admirer of Bell's criticisms, and had spoken to me with considerable enthusiasm of his "Since Cézanne."

forms are all here, though I may have left out many details. But I think I have tabulated a sufficient number of items to serve as a working basis."

He held out the papers to Markham.

"The truth lies somewhere in that list. If we could put the facts together—relate them to one another with their correct values—we'd know who was at the bottom of this orgy of crime; for, once we determined the pattern, each of the items would take on a vital significance, and we could read clearly the message they had to tell us."

Markham took the summary and, moving his chair nearer to the light, read through it without a word.

I preserved the original copy of the document; and, of all the records I possess, it was the most important and far-reaching in its effects. Indeed, it was the instrument by means of which the Greene case was solved. Had it not been for this recapitulation, prepared by Vance and later analyzed by him, the famous mass murder at the Greene mansion would doubtless have been relegated to the category of unsolved crimes.

Herewith is a verbatim reproduction of it:

GENERAL FACTS

1. An atmosphere of mutual hatred pervades the Greene mansion.

2. Mrs. Greene is a nagging, complaining paralytic, making life miserable for the whole household.

3. There are five children—two daughters, two sons, and one adopted daughter—who have nothing in common, and live in a state of constant antagonism and bitterness toward one another.

4. Though Mrs. Mannheim, the cook, was acquainted

with Tobias Greene years ago and was remembered in his will, she refuses to reveal any of the facts in her past.

5. The will of Tobias Greene stipulated that the family must live in the Greene mansion for twenty-five years on pain of disinheritance, with the one exception that, if Ada should marry, she could establish a residence elsewhere, as she was not of the Greene blood. By the will Mrs. Greene has the handling and disposition of the money.

6. Mrs. Greene's will makes the five children equal beneficiaries. In event of death of any of them the survivors share alike; and if all should die the estate goes to their families, if any.

7. The sleeping-rooms of the Greenes are arranged thus: Julia's and Rex's face each other at the front of the house; Chester's and Ada's face each other in the centre of the house; and Sibella's and Mrs. Greene's face each other at the rear. No two rooms intercommunicate, with the exception of Ada's and Mrs. Greene's; and these two rooms also give on the same balcony.

8. The library of Tobias Greene, which Mrs. Greene believes she had kept locked for twelve years, contains a remarkably complete collection of books on criminology and allied subjects.

9. Tobias Greene's past was somewhat mysterious, and there were many rumors concerning shady transactions carried on by him in foreign lands.

FIRST CRIME

10. Julia is killed by a contact shot, fired from the front, at 11.30 P. M.

11. Ada is shot from behind, also by a contact shot. She recovers.

12. Julia is found in bed, with a look of horror and amazement on her face.

13. Ada is found on the floor before the dressing-table.

14. The lights have been turned on in both rooms.

15. Over three minutes elapse between the two shots.

16. Von Blon, summoned immediately, arrives within half an hour.

17. A set of footprints, other than Von Blon's, leaving and approaching the house, is found; but the character of the snow renders them indecipherable.

18. The tracks have been made during the half-hour preceding the crime.

19. Both shootings are done with a .32 revolver.

20. Chester reports that an old .32 revolver of his is missing.

21. Chester is not satisfied with the police theory of a burglar, and insists that the District Attorney's office investigate the case.

22. Mrs. Greene is aroused by the shot fired in Ada's room, and hears Ada fall. But she hears no footsteps or sound of a door closing.

23. Sproot is half-way down the servants' stairs when the second shot is fired, yet he encounters no one in the hall. Nor does he hear any noise.

24. Rex, in the room next to Ada's, says he heard no shot.

25. Rex intimates that Chester knows more about the tragedy than he admits.

26. There is some secret between Chester and Sibella.

27. Sibella, like Chester, repudiates the burglar theory, but refuses to suggest an alternative, and says frankly that any member of the Greene family may be guilty.

28. Ada says she was awakened by a menacing presence in her room, which was in darkness; that she attempted to run from the intruder, but was pursued by shuffling footsteps.

29. Ada says a hand touched her when she first arose from bed, but refuses to make any attempt to identify the hand.

30. Sibella challenges Ada to say that it was she (Sibella) who was in the room, and then deliberately accuses Ada of having shot Julia. She also accuses Ada of having stolen the revolver from Chester's room.

31. Von Blon, by his attitude and manner, reveals a curious intimacy between Sibella and himself.

32. Ada is frankly fond of Von Blon.

SECOND CRIME

33. Four days after Julia and Ada are shot, at 11.30 P. M., Chester is murdered by a contact shot fired from a .32 revolver.

34. There is a look of amazement and horror on his face.

35. Sibella hears the shot and summons Sproot.

36. Sibella says she listened at her door immediately after the shot was fired, but heard no other sound.

37. The lights are on in Chester's room. He was apparently reading when the murderer entered.

38. A clear double set of footprints is found on the front walk. The tracks have been made within a half-hour of the crime.

39. A pair of galoshes, exactly corresponding to the footprints, is found in Chester's clothes-closet.

40. Ada had a premonition of Chester's death, and, when informed of it, guesses he has been shot in the same manner as Julia. But she is greatly relieved when shown the footprint patterns indicating that the murderer is an outsider.

41. Rex says he heard a noise in the hall and the sound of a door closing twenty minutes before the shot was fired.

42. Ada, when told of Rex's story, recalls also having heard a door close at some time after eleven.

43. It is obvious that Ada knows or suspects something.

44. The cook becomes emotional at the thought of any one wanting to harm Ada, but says she can understand a person having a reason to shoot Julia and Chester.

45. Rex, when interviewed, shows clearly that he thinks some one in the house is guilty.

46. Rex accuses Von Blon of being the murderer.

47. Mrs. Greene makes a request that the investigation be dropped.

THIRD CRIME

48. Rex is shot in the forehead with a .32 revolver, at 11.20 A. M., twenty days after Chester has been killed and

within five minutes of the time Ada phones him from the District Attorney's office.

49. There is no look of horror or surprise on Rex's face, as was the case with Julia and Chester.

50. His body is found on the floor before the mantel.

51. A diagram which Ada asked him to bring with him to the District Attorney's office has disappeared.

52. No one up-stairs hears the shot, though the doors are open; but Sproot, down-stairs in the butler's pantry, hears it distinctly.

53. Von Blon is visiting Sibella that morning; but she says she was in the bathroom bathing her dog at the time Rex was shot.

54. Footprints are found in Ada's room coming from the balcony door, which is ajar.

55. A single set of footprints is found leading from the front walk to the balcony.

56. The tracks could have been made at any time after nine o'clock that morning.

57. Sibella refuses to go away on a visit.

58. The galoshes that made all three sets of footprints are found in the linen-closet, although they were not there when the house was searched for the revolver.

59. The galoshes are returned to the linen-closet, but disappear that night.

FOURTH CRIME

60. Two days after Rex's death Ada and Mrs. Greene are poisoned within twelve hours of each other—Ada with morphine, Mrs. Greene with strychnine.

61. Ada is treated at once, and recovers.

62. Von Blon is seen leaving the house just before Ada swallows the poison.

63. Ada is discovered by Sproot as a result of Sibella's dog catching his teeth in the bell-cord.

64. The morphine was taken in the bouillon which Ada habitually drank in the mornings.

65. Ada states that no one visited her in her room after

the nurse had called her to come and drink the bouillon, but that she went to Julia's room to get a shawl, leaving the bouillon unguarded for several moments.

66. Neither Ada nor the nurse remembers having seen Sibella's dog in the hall before the poisoned bouillon was taken.

67. Mrs. Greene is found dead of strychnine-poisoning the morning after Ada swallowed the morphine.

68. The strychnine could have been administered only after 11 P. M. the previous night.

69. The nurse was in her room on the third floor between 11 and 11.30 P. M.

70. Von Blon was calling on Sibella that night, but Sibella says he left her at 10.45.

71. The strychnine was administered in a dose of citrocarbonate, which, presumably, Mrs. Greene would not have taken without assistance.

72. Sibella decides to visit a girl chum in Atlantic City, and leaves New York on the afternoon train.

DISTRIBUTABLE FACTS

73. The same revolver is used on Julia, Ada, Chester, and Rex.

74. All three sets of footprints have obviously been made by some one in the house for the purpose of casting suspicion on an outsider.

75. The murderer is some one whom both Julia and Chester would receive in their rooms, in negligé, late at night.

76. The murderer does not make himself known to Ada, but enters her room surreptitiously.

77. Nearly three weeks after Chester's death Ada comes to the District Attorney's office, stating she has important news to impart.

78. Ada says that Rex has confessed to her that he heard the shot in her room and also heard other things, but was afraid to admit them; and she asks that Rex be questioned.

79. Ada tells of having found a cryptic diagram, marked with symbols, in the lower hall near the library door.

80. On the day of Rex's murder Von Blon reports that his medicine-case has been rifled of three grains of strychnine and six grains of morphine—presumably at the Greene mansion.

81. The library reveals the fact that some one has been in the habit of going there and reading by candle-light. The books that show signs of having been read are: a handbook of the criminal sciences, two works on toxicology, and two treatises on hysterical paralysis and sleep-walking.

82. The visitor to the library is some one who understands German well, for three of the books that have been read are in German.

83. The galoshes that disappeared from the linen-closet on the night of Rex's murder are found in the library.

84. Some one listens at the door while the library is being inspected.

85. Ada reports that she saw Mrs. Greene walking in the lower hall the night before.

86. Von Blon asserts that Mrs. Greene's paralysis is of a nature that makes movement a physical impossibility.

87. Arrangements are made with Von Blon to have Doctor Oppenheimer examine Mrs. Greene.

88. Von Blon informs Mrs. Greene of the proposed examination, which he has scheduled for the following day.

89. Mrs. Greene is poisoned before Doctor Oppenheimer's examination can be made.

90. The *post mortem* reveals conclusively that Mrs. Greene's leg muscles were so atrophied that she could not have walked.

91. Ada, when told of the autopsy, insists that she saw her mother's shawl about the figure in the hall, and, on being pressed, admits that Sibella sometimes wore it.

92. During the questioning of Ada regarding the shawl Mrs. Mannheim suggests that it was she herself whom Ada saw in the hall.

93. When Julia and Ada were shot there were, or could have been, present in the house: Chester, Sibella,

Rex, Mrs. Greene, Von Blon, Barton, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

94. When Chester was shot there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Rex, Mrs. Greene, Ada, Von Blon, Barton, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

95. When Rex was shot there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Mrs. Greene, Von Blon, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

96. When Ada was poisoned there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Mrs. Greene, Von Blon, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

97. When Mrs. Greene was poisoned there were, or could have been, present in the house: Sibella, Von Blon, Ada, Hemming, Sproot, and Mrs. Mannheim.

When Markham had finished reading the summary, he went through it a second time. Then he laid it on the table.

"Yes, Vance," he said, "you've covered the main points pretty thoroughly. But I can't see any coherence in them. In fact, they seem only to emphasize the confusion of the case."

"And yet, Markham, I'm convinced that they only need rearrangement and interpretation to be perfectly clear. Properly analyzed, they'll tell us everything we want to know."

Markham glanced again through the pages.

"If it wasn't for certain items, we could make out a case against several people. But no matter what person in the list we may assume to be guilty, we are at once confronted by a group of contradictory and insurmountable facts. This *précis* could be used effectively to prove that every one concerned is innocent."

"Superficially it appears that way," agreed Vance.

"But we first must find the generating line of the design, and then relate the subsidi'ry forms of the pattern to it."

Markham made a hopeless gesture.

"If only life were as simple as your æsthetic theories!"

"It's dashed simpler," Vance asserted. "The mere mechanism of a camera can record life; but only a highly developed creative intelligence, with a profound philosophic insight, can produce a work of art."

"Can *you* make any sense—æsthetic or otherwise—out of this?" Markham petulantly tapped the sheets of paper.

"I can see certain traceries, so to speak—certain suggestions of a pattern; but I'll admit the main design has thus far eluded me. The fact is, Markham, I have a feeling that some important factor in this case—some balancing line of the pattern, perhaps—is still hidden from us. I don't say that my résumé is insusceptible of interpretation in its present state; but our task would be greatly simplified if we were in possession of the missing integer."

Fifteen minutes later, when we had returned to Markham's main office, Swacker came in and laid a letter on the desk.

"There's a funny one, Chief," he said.

Markham took up the letter and read it with a deepening frown. When he had finished, he handed it to Vance. The letter-head read, "Rectory, Third Presbyterian Church, Stamford, Connecticut"; the date was the preceding day; and the signature was that of the Reverend Anthony Seymour. The con-

tents of the letter, written in a small, precise hand, were as follows:

The Honorable John F.-X. Markham,

Dear Sir: As far as I am aware, I have never betrayed a confidence. But there can arise, I believe, unforeseen circumstances to modify the strictness of one's adherence to a given promise, and indeed impose upon one a greater duty than that of keeping silent.

I have read in the papers of the wicked and abominable things that have happened at the Greene residence in New York; and I have therefore come to the conclusion, after much heart-searching and prayer, that it is my bounden duty to put you in possession of a fact which, as the result of a promise, I have kept to myself for over a year. I would not now betray this trust did I not believe that some good might possibly come of it, and that you, my dear sir, would also treat the matter in the most sacred confidence. It may not help you—indeed, I do not see how it can possibly lead to a solution of the terrible curse that has fallen upon the Greene family—but since the fact is connected intimately with one of the members of that family, I will feel better when I have communicated it to you.

On the night of August 29, of last year, a machine drove up to my door, and a man and a woman asked that I secretly marry them. I may say that I am frequently receiving such requests from runaway couples. This particular couple appeared to be well-bred dependable people, and I concurred with their wishes, giving them my assurances that the ceremony would, as they desired, be kept confidential.

The names that appeared on the license—which had been secured in New Haven late that afternoon—were Sibella Greene, of New York City, and Arthur Von Blon, also of New York City.

Vance read the letter and handed it back.

"Really, y' know, I can't say that I'm astonished——"

Suddenly he broke off, his eyes fixed thoughtfully before him. Then he rose nervously and paced up and down.

"That tears it!" he exclaimed.

Markham threw him a look of puzzled interrogation.

"What's the point?"

"Don't you see?" Vance came quickly to the District Attorney's desk. "My word! That's the one fact that's missing from my tabulation." He then unfolded the last sheet and wrote:

98. Sibella and Von Blon were secretly married a year ago.

"But I don't see how that helps," protested Markham.

"Neither do I at this moment," Vance replied. "But I'm going to spend this evening in erudite meditation."

CHAPTER XXIV

A MYSTERIOUS TRIP

(Sunday, December 5)

The Boston Symphony Orchestra was scheduled that afternoon to play a Bach Concerto and Beethoven's C-Minor Symphony; and Vance, on leaving the District Attorney's office, rode direct to Carnegie Hall. He sat through the concert in a state of relaxed receptivity, and afterward insisted on walking the two miles back to his quarters—an almost unheard-of thing for him.

Shortly after dinner Vance bade me good night and, donning his slippers and house-robe, went into the library. I had considerable work to do that night, and it was long past midnight when I finished. On the way to my room I passed the library door, which had been left slightly ajar, and I saw Vance sitting at his desk—his head in his hands, the summary lying before him—in an attitude of oblivious concentration. He was smoking, as was habitual with him during any sort of mental activity; and the ash-receiver at his elbow was filled with cigarette-stubs. I moved on quietly, marvelling at the way this new problem had taken hold of him.

It was half past three in the morning when I suddenly awoke, conscious of footsteps somewhere in the house. Rising quietly, I went into the hall, drawn by a vague curiosity mingled with uneasiness.

At the end of the corridor a panel of light fell on the wall, and as I moved forward in the semidarkness I saw that the light issued from the partly open library door. At the same time I became aware that the footsteps, too, came from that room. I could not resist looking inside; and there I saw Vance walking up and down, his chin sunk on his breast, his hands crammed into the deep pockets of his dressing-gown. The room was dense with cigarette-smoke, and his figure appeared misty in the blue haze. I went back to bed and lay awake for an hour. When finally I dozed off it was to the accompaniment of those rhythmic footfalls in the library.

I rose at eight o'clock. It was a dark, dismal Sunday, and I had my coffee in the living-room by electric light. When I glanced into the library at nine Vance was still there, sitting at his desk. The reading-lamp was burning, but the fire on the hearth had died out. Returning to the living-room, I tried to interest myself in the Sunday newspapers; but after scanning the accounts of the Greene case I lit my pipe and drew up my chair before the grate.

It was nearly ten o'clock when Vance appeared at the door. All night he had been up, wrestling with his self-imposed problem; and the devitalizing effects of this long, sleepless concentration showed on him only too plainly. There were shadowed circles round his eyes; his mouth was drawn; and even his shoulders sagged wearily. But, despite the shock his appearance gave me, my dominant emotion was one of avid curiosity. I wanted to know the outcome of his all-night vigil; and as he came into the room I gave him a look of questioning expectancy.

When his eyes met mine he nodded slowly.

"I've traced the design," he said, holding out his hands to the warmth of the fire. "And it's more horrible than I even imagined." He was silent for some minutes. "Telephone Markham for me, will you, Van? Tell him I must see him at once. Ask him to come to breakfast. Explain that I'm a bit fagged."

He went out, and I heard him calling to Currie to prepare his bath.

I had no difficulty in inducing Markham to breakfast with us after I had explained the situation; and in less than an hour he arrived. Vance was dressed and shaved, and looked considerably fresher than when I had first seen him that morning; but he was still pale, and his eyes were fatigued.

No mention was made of the Greene case during breakfast, but when we had sought easy chairs in the library, Markham could withhold his impatience no longer.

"Van intimated over the phone that you had made something out of the summary."

"Yes." Vance spoke dispiritedly. "I've fitted all the items together. And it's damnable! No wonder the truth escaped us."

Markham leaned forward, his face tense, unbelieving.

"You know the truth?"

"Yes, I know," came the quiet answer. "That is, my brain has told me conclusively who's at the bottom of this fiendish affair; but even now—in the daylight—I can't credit it. Everything in me revolts against the acceptance of the truth. The fact

is, I'm almost afraid to accept it. . . . Dash it all, I'm getting mellow. Middle-age has crept upon me." He attempted to smile, but failed.

Markham waited in silence.

"No, old man," continued Vance; "I'm not going to tell you now. I can't tell you until I've looked into one or two matters. You see, the pattern is plain enough, but the recognizable objects, set in their new relationships, are grotesque—like the shapes in an awful dream. I must first touch them and measure them to make sure that they're not, after all, mere abortive vagaries."

"And how long will this verification take?" Markham knew there was no use to try to force the issue. He realized that Vance was fully conscious of the seriousness of the situation, and respected his decision to investigate certain points before revealing his conclusions.

"Not long, I hope." Vance went to his desk and wrote something on a piece of paper, which he handed to Markham. "Here's a list of the five books in Tobias's library that showed signs of having been read by the nocturnal visitor. I want those books, Markham—immediately. But I don't want any one to know about their being taken away. Therefore, I'm going to ask you to phone Nurse O'Brien to get Mrs. Greene's key and secure them when no one is looking. Tell her to wrap them up and give them to the detective on guard in the house with instructions to bring them here. You can explain to her what section of the book-shelves they're in."

Markham took the paper and rose without a word. At the door of the den, however, he paused.

"Do you think it wise for the man to leave the house?"

"It won't matter," Vance told him. "Nothing more can happen there at present."

Markham went on into the den. In a few minutes he returned.

"The books will be here in half an hour."

When the detective arrived with the package Vance unwrapped it and laid the volumes beside his chair.

"Now, Markham, I'm going to do some reading. You won't mind, what?" Despite his casual tone, it was evident that an urgent seriousness underlay his words.

Markham got up immediately; and again I marvelled at the complete understanding that existed between these two disparate men.

"I have a number of personal letters to write," he said, "so I'll run along. Currie's omelet was excellent.—When shall I see you again? I could drop round at tea-time."

Vance held out his hand with a look bordering on affection.

"Make it five o'clock. I'll be through with my perusings by then. And thanks for your tolerance." Then he added gravely: "You'll understand, after I've told you everything, why I wanted to wait a bit."

When Markham returned that afternoon a little before five Vance was still reading in the library; but shortly afterward he joined us in the living-room.

"The picture clarifies," he said. "The fantastic

images are gradually taking on the aspect of hideous realities. I've substantiated several points, but a few facts still need corroboration."

"To vindicate your hypothesis?"

"No, not that. The hypothesis is self-proving. There's no doubt as to the truth. But—dash it all, Markham!—I refuse to accept it until every scrap of evidence has been incontestably sustained."

"Is the evidence of such a nature that I can use it in a court of law?"

"That is something I refuse even to consider. Criminal proceedings seem utterly irrelevant in the present case. But I suppose society must have its pound of flesh, and you—the duly elected Shylock of God's great common people—will no doubt wield the knife. However, I assure you I shall not be present at the butchery."

Markham studied him curiously.

"Your words sound rather ominous. But if, as you say, you have discovered the perpetrator of these crimes, why shouldn't society exact punishment?"

"If society were omniscient, Markham, it would have a right to sit in judgment. But society is ignorant and venomous, devoid of any trace of insight or understanding. It exalts knavery, and worships stupidity. It crucifies the intelligent, and puts the diseased in dungeons. And, withal, it arrogates to itself the right and ability to analyze the subtle sources of what it calls 'crime,' and to condemn to death all persons whose inborn and irresistible impulses it does not like. That's your sweet society, Markham—a pack of wolves watering at

the mouth for victims on whom to vent its organized lust to kill and flay."

Markham regarded him with some astonishment and considerable concern.

"Perhaps you are preparing to let the criminal escape in the present case," he said, with the irony of resentment.

"Oh, no," Vance assured him. "I shall turn your victim over to you. The Greene murderer is of a particularly vicious type, and should be rendered impotent. I was merely trying to suggest that the electric chair—that touchin' device of your beloved society—is not quite the correct method of dealing with this culprit."

"You admit, however, that he is a menace to society."

"Undoubtedly. And the hideous thing about it is that this tournament of crime at the Greene mansion will continue unless we can put a stop to it. That's why I am being so careful. As the case now stands, I doubt if you could even make an arrest."

When tea was over Vance got up and stretched himself.

"By the by, Markham," he said offhandedly, "have you received any report on Sibella's activities?"

"Nothing important. She's still in Atlantic City, and evidently intends to stay there for some time. She phoned Sproot yesterday to send down another trunkful of her clothes."

"Did she, now? That's very gratifyin'." Vance walked to the door with sudden resolution. "I think I'll run out to the Greenes' for a little while. I

sha'n't be gone over an hour. Wait for me here, Markham—there's a good fellow; I don't want my visit to have an official flavor. There's a new *Simplicissimus* on the table to amuse you till I return. Con it and thank your own special gods that you have no Thöny or Gulbranssen in this country to caricature your Gladstonian features."

As he spoke he beckoned to me, and, before Markham could question him, we passed out into the hall and down the stairs. Fifteen minutes later a taxicab set us down before the Greene mansion.

Sproot opened the door for us, and Vance, with only a curt greeting, led him into the drawing-room.

"I understand," he said, "that Miss Sibella phoned you yesterday from Atlantic City and asked to have a trunk shipped to her."

Sproot bowed. "Yes, sir. I sent the trunk off last night."

"What did Miss Sibella say to you over the phone?"

"Very little, sir—the connection was not good. She said merely that she had no intention of returning to New York for a considerable time and needed more clothes than she had taken with her."

"Did she ask how things were going at the house here?"

"Only in the most casual way, sir."

"Then she didn't seem apprehensive about what might happen here while she was away?"

"No, sir. In fact—if I may say so without disloyalty—her tone of voice was quite indifferent, sir."

"Judging from her remarks about the trunk, how long would you say she intends to be away?"

Sproot considered the matter.

"That's difficult to say, sir. But I would go so far as to venture the opinion that Miss Sibella intends to remain in Atlantic City for a month or more."

Vance nodded with satisfaction.

"And now, Sproot," he said, "I have a particularly important question to ask you. When you first went into Miss Ada's room on the night she was shot and found her on the floor before the dressing-table, was the window open? Think! I want a positive answer. You know the window is just beside the dressing-table and overlooks the steps leading to the stone balcony. *Was it open or shut?*"

Sproot contracted his brows and appeared to be recalling the scene. Finally he spoke, and there was no doubt in his voice.

"The window was open, sir. I recall it now quite distinctly. After Mr. Chester and I had lifted Miss Ada to the bed, I closed it at once for fear she would catch cold."

"How far open was the window?" asked Vance with eager impatience.

"Eight or nine inches, sir, I should say. Perhaps a foot."

"Thank you, Sproot. That will be all. Now please tell the cook I want to see her."

Mrs. Mannheim came in a few minutes later, and Vance indicated a chair near the desk-light. When the woman had seated herself he stood before her and fixed her with a stern, implacable gaze.

"Frau Mannheim, the time for truth-telling has come. I am here to ask you a few questions, and un-

less I receive a straight answer to them I shall report you to the police. You will, I assure you, receive no consideration at their hands."

The woman tightened her lips stubbornly and shifted her eyes, unable to meet Vance's penetrating stare.

"You told me once that your husband died in New Orleans thirteen years ago. Is that correct?"

Vance's question seemed to relieve her mind, and she answered readily.

"Yes, yes. Thirteen years ago."

"What month?"

"In October."

"Had he been ill long?"

"About a year."

"What was the nature of his illness?"

Now a look of fright came into her eyes.

"I—don't know—exactly," she stammered. "The doctors didn't let me see him."

"He was in a hospital?"

She nodded several times rapidly. "Yes—a hospital."

"And I believe you told me, Frau Mannheim, that you saw Mr. Tobias Greene a year before your husband's death. That would have been about the time your husband entered the hospital—fourteen years ago."

She looked vaguely at Vance, but made no reply.

"And it was exactly fourteen years ago that Mr. Greene adopted Ada."

The woman caught her breath sharply. A look of panic contorted her face.

"So when your husband died," continued Vance,

"you came to Mr. Greene, knowing he would give you a position."

He went up to her and touched her filially on the shoulder.

"I have suspected for some time, Frau Mannheim," he said kindly, "that Ada is your daughter. It's true, isn't it?"

With a convulsive sob the woman hid her face in her apron.

"I gave Mr. Greene my word," she confessed brokenly, "that I wouldn't tell any one—not even Ada—if he let me stay here—to be near her."

"You haven't told any one," Vance consoled her. "It was not your fault that I guessed it. But why didn't Ada recognize you?"

"She had been away—to school—since she was five."

When Mrs. Mannheim left us a little later Vance had succeeded in allaying her apprehension and distress. He then sent for Ada.

As she entered the drawing-room the troubled look in her eyes and the pallor of her cheeks told clearly of the strain she was under. Her first question voiced the fear uppermost in her mind.

"Have you found out anything, Mr. Vance?" She spoke with an air of pitiful discouragement. "It's terrible alone here in this big house—especially at night. Every sound I hear . . ."

"You mustn't let your imagination get the better of you, Ada," Vance counselled her. Then he added: "We know a lot more now than we did, and before long, I hope, all your fears will be done away with. In fact, it's in regard to what we've found out that

I've come here to-day. I thought perhaps you could help me again."

"If only I could! But I've thought and thought. . . ."

Vance smiled.

"Let us do the thinking, Ada.—What I wanted to ask you is this: do you know if Sibella speaks German well?"

The girl appeared surprised.

"Why, yes. And so did Julia and Chester and Rex. Father insisted on their learning it. And he spoke it too—almost as well as he spoke English. As for Sibella, I've often heard her and Doctor Von talking in German."

"But she spoke with an accent, I suppose."

"A slight accent—she'd never been long in Germany. But she spoke very well German."

"That's what I wanted to be sure of."

"Then you do know something!" Her voice quavered with eagerness. "Oh, how long before this awful suspense will be over? Every night for weeks I've been afraid to turn out my lights and go to sleep."

"You needn't be afraid to turn out your lights now," Vance assured her. "There won't be any more attempts on your life, Ada."

She looked at him for a moment searchingly, and something in his manner seemed to hearten her. When we took our leave the color had come back to her cheeks.

Markham was pacing the library restlessly when we arrived home.

"I've checked several more points," Vance an-

nounced. "But I've missed the important one—the one that would explain the unbelievable hideousness of the thing I've unearthed."

He went directly into the den, and we could hear him telephoning. Returning a few minutes later, he looked anxiously at his watch. Then he rang for Currie and ordered his bag packed for a week's trip.

"I'm going away, Markham," he said. "I'm going to travel—they say it broadens the mind. My train departs in less than an hour; and I'll be away a week. Can you bear to be without me for so long? However, nothing will happen in connection with the Greene case during my absence. In fact, I'd advise you to shelve it temporarily."

He would say no more, and in half an hour he was ready to go.

"There's one thing you can do for me while I'm away," he told Markham, as he slipped into his overcoat. "Please have drawn up for me a complete and detailed weather report from the day preceding Julia's death to the day following Rex's murder."

He would not let either Markham or me accompany him to the station, and we were left in ignorance of even the direction in which his mysterious trip was to take him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CAPTURE

(Monday, December 13; 4 p. m.)

It was eight days before Vance returned to New York. He arrived on the afternoon of Monday, December 13, and, after he had had his tub and changed his clothes, he telephoned Markham to expect him in half an hour. He then ordered his Hispano-Suiza from the garage; and by this sign I knew he was under a nervous strain. In fact, he had spoken scarcely a dozen words to me since his return, and as he picked his way down-town through the late afternoon traffic he was gloomy and preoccupied. Once I ventured to ask him if his trip had been successful, and he had merely nodded. But when we turned into Centre Street he relented a little, and said:

"There was never any doubt as to the success of my trip, Van. I knew what I'd find. But I didn't dare trust my reason; I had to see the records with my own eyes before I'd capitulate unreservedly to the conclusion I'd formed."

Both Markham and Heath were waiting for us in the District Attorney's office. It was just four o'clock, and the sun had already dropped below the New York Life Building which towered above the old Criminal Courts structure a block to the southwest.

"I took it for granted you had something impor-

tant to tell me," said Markham; "so I asked the Sergeant to come here."

"Yes, I've much to tell." Vance had thrown himself into a chair, and was lighting a cigarette. "But first I want to know if anything has happened in my absence."

"Nothing. Your prognostication was quite accurate. Things have been quiet and apparently normal at the Greene mansion."

"Anyhow," interposed Heath, "we may have a little better chance this week of getting hold of something to work on. Sibella returned from Atlantic City yesterday, and Von Blon's been hanging round the house ever since."

"Sibella back?" Vance sat up, and his eyes became intent.

"At six o'clock yesterday evening," said Markham. "The newspaper men at the beach ferreted her out and ran a sensational story about her. After that the poor girl didn't have an hour's peace; so yesterday she packed up and came back. We got word of the move through the men the Sergeant had set to watch her. I ran out to see her this morning, and advised her to go away again. But she was pretty thoroughly disgusted, and stubbornly refused to quit the Greene house—said death was preferable to being hounded by reporters and scandalmongers."

Vance had risen and moved to the window, where he stood scanning the gray sky-line.

"Sibella's back, eh?" he murmured. Then he turned round. "Let me see that weather report I asked you to prepare for me."

Markham reached into a drawer and handed him a typewritten sheet of paper.

After perusing it he tossed it back on the desk.

"Keep that, Markham. You'll need it when you face your twelve good men and true."

"What is it you have to tell us, Mr. Vance?" The Sergeant's voice was impatient despite his effort to control it. "Mr. Markham said you had a line on the case.—For God's sake, sir, if you've got any evidence against any one, slip it to me and let me make an arrest. I'm getting thin worrying over this damn business."

Vance drew himself together.

"Yes, I know who the murderer is, Sergeant; and I have the evidence—though it wasn't my plan to tell you just yet. However"—he went to the door with grim resolution—"we can't delay matters any longer now. Our hand has been forced.—Get into your coat, Sergeant—and you, too, Markham. We'd better get out to the Greene house before dark."

"But, damn it all, Vance!" Markham expostulated. "Why don't you tell us what's in your mind?"

"I can't explain now—you'll understand why later——"

"If you know so much, Mr. Vance," broke in Heath, "what's keeping us from making an arrest?"

"You're going to make your arrest, Sergeant—inside of an hour." Though he gave the promise without enthusiasm, it acted electrically on both Heath and Markham.

Five minutes later the four of us were driving up West Broadway in Vance's car.

Sproot as usual admitted us without the faintest

show of interest, and stood aside respectfully for us to enter.

"We wish to see Miss Sibella," said Vance. "Please tell her to come to the drawing-room—alone."

"I'm sorry, sir, but Miss Sibella is out."

"Then tell Miss Ada we want to see her."

"Miss Ada is out also, sir." The butler's unemotional tone sounded strangely incongruous in the tense atmosphere we had brought with us.

"When do you expect them back?"

"I couldn't say, sir. They went out motoring together. They probably won't be gone long. Would you gentlemen care to wait?"

Vance hesitated.

"Yes, we'll wait," he decided, and walked toward the drawing-room.

But he had barely reached the archway when he turned suddenly and called to Sproot, who was retreating slowly toward the rear of the hall.

"You say Miss Sibella and Miss Ada went motoring together? How long ago?"

"About fifteen minutes—maybe twenty, sir." A barely perceptible lift of the man's eyebrows indicated that he was greatly astonished by Vance's sudden change of manner.

"Whose car did they go in?"

"In Doctor Von Blon's. He was here to tea——"

"And who suggested the ride, Sproot?"

"I really couldn't say, sir. They were sort of debating about it when I came in to clear away the tea things."

"Repeat everything you heard!" Vance spoke rapidly and with more than a trace of excitement.

"When I entered the room the doctor was saying as how he thought it would be a good thing for the young ladies to get some fresh air; and Miss Sibella said she'd had enough fresh air."

"And Miss Ada?"

"I don't remember her saying anything, sir."

"And they went out to the car while you were here?"

"Yes, sir. I opened the door for them."

"And did Doctor Von Blon go in the car with them?"

"Yes. But I believe they were to drop him at Mrs. Riglander's, where he had a professional call to make. From what he said as he went out I gathered that the young ladies were then to take a drive, and that he was to call here for the car after dinner."

"What!" Vance stiffened, and his eyes burned upon the old butler. "Quick, Sproot! Do you know where Mrs. Riglander lives?"

"On Madison Avenue in the Sixties, I believe."

"Get her on the phone—find out if the doctor has arrived."

I could not help marvelling at the impassive way in which the man went to the telephone to comply with this astonishing and seemingly incomprehensible request. When he returned his face was expressionless.

"The doctor has not arrived at Mrs. Riglander's, sir," he reported.

"He's certainly had time," Vance commented, half to himself. Then: "Who drove the car when it left here, Sproot?"

"I couldn't say for certain, sir. I didn't notice

particularly. But it's my impression that Miss Sibella entered the car first as though she intended to drive——"

"Come, Markham!" Vance started for the door. "I don't like this at all. There's a mad idea in my head. . . . Hurry, man! If something devilish should happen . . ."

We had reached the car, and Vance sprang to the wheel. Heath and Markham, in a daze of incomprehension but swept along by the other's ominous insistence, took their places in the tonneau; and I sat beside the driver's seat.

"We're going to break all the traffic and speed regulations, Sergeant," Vance announced, as he manœuvred the car in the narrow street; "so have your badge and credentials handy. I may be taking you chaps on a wild-goose chase, but we've got to risk it."

We darted toward First Avenue, cut the corner short, and turned up-town. At 59th Street we swung west and went toward Columbus Circle. A surface car held us up at Lexington Avenue; and at Fifth Avenue we were stopped by a traffic officer. But Heath showed his card and spoke a few words, and we struck across Central Park. Swinging perilously round the curves of the driveways, we came out into 81st Street and headed for Riverside Drive. There was less congestion here, and we made between forty and fifty miles an hour all the way to Dyckman Street.

It was a nerve-racking ordeal, for not only had the shadows of evening fallen, but the streets were slippery in places where the melted snow had frozen

in large sheets along the sloping sides of the Drive. Vance, however, was an excellent driver. For two years he had driven the same car, and he understood thoroughly how to handle it. Once we skidded drunkenly, but he managed to right the traction before the rear wheels came in contact with the high curbing. He kept the siren horn screeching constantly, and other cars drew away from us, giving us a fairly clear road.

At several street intersections we had to slow down; and twice we were halted by traffic officers, but were permitted to proceed the moment the occupants of the tonneau were recognized. On North Broadway we were forced to the curb by a motorcycle policeman, who showered us with a stream of picturesque abuse. But when Heath had cut him short with still more colorful vituperation, and he had made out Markham's features in the shadows, he became ludicrously humble, and acted as an advance-guard for us all the way to Yonkers, clearing the road and holding up traffic at every cross-street.

At the railroad tracks near Yonkers Ferry we were obliged to wait several minutes for the shunting of some freight-cars, and Markham took this opportunity of venting his emotions.

"I presume you have a good reason for this insane ride, Vance," he said angrily. "But since I'm taking my life in my hands by accompanying you, I'd like to know what your objective is."

"There's no time now for explanations," Vance replied brusquely. "Either I'm on a fool's errand, or there's an abominable tragedy ahead of us." His face was set and white, and he looked anxiously at his watch. "We're twenty minutes ahead of the

usual running time from the Plaza to Yonkers. Furthermore, we're taking the direct route to our destination—another ten minutes' saving. If the thing I fear is scheduled for to-night, the other car will go by the Spuyten Duyvil Road and through the back lanes along the river——"

At this moment the crossing-bars were lifted, and our car jerked forward, picking up speed with breathless rapidity.

Vance's words had set a train of thought going in my mind. The Spuyten Duyvil Road—the back lanes along the river. . . . Suddenly there flashed on my brain a memory of that other ride we had taken weeks before with Sibella and Ada and Von Blon; and a sense of something inimical and indescribably horrifying took possession of me. I tried to recall the details of that ride—how we had turned off the main road at Dyckman Street, skirted the palisades through old wooded estates, traversed private hedge-lined roadways, entered Yonkers from the Riverdale Road, turned again from the main highway past the Ardsley Country Club, taken the little-used road along the river toward Tarrytown, and stopped on the high cliff to get a panoramic view of the Hudson. . . . That cliff overlooking the waters of the river!—Ah, now I remembered Sibella's cruel jest—her supposedly satirical suggestion of how a perfect murder might be committed there. And on the instant of that recollection I knew where Vance was heading—I understood the thing he feared! He believed that another car was also heading for that lonely precipice beyond Ardsley—a car that had nearly half an hour start. . . .

We were now below the Longue Vue hill, and a

few moments later we swung into the Hudson Road. At Dobbs Ferry another officer stepped in our path and waved frantically; but Heath, leaning over the running-board, shouted some unintelligible words, and Vance, without slackening speed, skirted the officer and plunged ahead toward Ardsley.

Ever since we had passed Yonkers, Vance had been inspecting every large car along the way. He was, I knew, looking for Von Blon's low-hung yellow Daimler. But there had been no sign of it, and, as he threw on the brakes preparatory to turning into the narrow road by the Country Club golf-links, I heard him mutter half aloud:

"God help us if we're too late!"*

We made the turn at the Ardsley station at such a rate of speed that I held my breath for fear we would upset; and I had to grip the seat with both hands to keep my balance as we jolted over the rough road along the river level. We took the hill before us in high gear, and climbed swiftly to the dirt roadway along the edge of the bluff beyond.

Scarcely had we rounded the hill's crest when an exclamation broke from Vance, and simultaneously I noticed a flickering red light bobbing in the distance. A new spurt of speed brought us perceptibly nearer to the car before us, and it was but a few moments before we could make out its lines and color. There was no mistaking Von Blon's great Daimler.

"Hide your faces," Vance shouted over his shoulder to Markham and Heath. "Don't let any one see you as we pass the car ahead."

* This was the first and only time during my entire friendship with Vance that I ever heard him use a Scriptural expletive.

I leaned over below the panel of the front door, and a few seconds later a sudden swerve told me that we were circling about the Daimler. The next moment we were back in the road, rushing forward in the lead.

Half a mile further on the road narrowed. There was a deep ditch on one side and dense shrubbery on the other. Vance quickly threw on the brakes, and our rear wheels skidded on the hard frozen earth, bringing us to a halt with our car turned almost at right angles with the road, completely blocking the way.

"Out, you chaps!" called Vance.

We had no more than alighted when the other car drove up and, with a grinding of brakes, came to a lurching halt within a few feet of our machine. Vance had run back, and as the car reached a standstill he threw open the front door. The rest of us had instinctively crowded after him, urged forward by some undefined sense of excitement and dread foreboding. The Daimler was of the sedan type with small high windows, and even with the lingering radiance of the western sky and the dashboard illumination I could barely make out the figures inside. But at that moment Heath's pocket flash-light blazed in the semidarkness.

The sight that met my straining eyes was paralyzing. During the drive I had speculated on the outcome of our tragic adventure, and I had pictured several hateful possibilities. But I was wholly unprepared for the revelation that confronted me.

The tonneau of the car was empty; and, contrary to my suspicions, there was no sign of Von Blon. In

the front seat were the two girls. Sibella was on the further side, slumped down in the corner, her head hanging forward. On her temple was an ugly cut, and a stream of blood ran down her cheek. At the wheel sat Ada, glowering at us with cold ferocity. Heath's flash-light fell directly on her face, and at first she did not recognize us. But as her pupils became adjusted to the glare her gaze concentrated on Vance, and a foul epithet burst from her.

Simultaneously her right hand dropped from the wheel to the seat beside her, and when she raised it again it held a small glittering revolver. There was a flash of flame and a sharp report, followed by a shattering of glass where the bullet had struck the wind-shield. Vance had been standing with one foot on the running-board leaning into the car, and, as Ada's arm came up with the revolver, he had snatched her wrist and held it.

"No, my dear," came his drawling voice, strangely calm and without animosity; "you sha'n't add me to your list. I was rather expecting that move, don't y' know."

Ada, frustrated in her attempt to shoot him, hurled herself upon him with savage fury. Vile abuse and unbelievable blasphemies poured from her snarling lips. Her wrath, feral and rampant, utterly possessed her. She was like a wild animal, cornered and conscious of defeat, yet fighting with a last instinct of hopeless desperation. Vance, however, had secured both her wrists, and could have broken her arms with a single twist of his hands; but he treated her almost tenderly, like a father subduing an infuriated child. Stepping back

quickly he drew her into the roadway, where she continued her struggles with renewed violence.

"Come, Sergeant!" Vance spoke with weary exasperation. "You'd better put handcuffs on her. I don't want to hurt her."

Heath had stood watching the amazing drama in a state of bewilderment, apparently too nonplussed to move. But Vance's voice awakened him to sharp activity. There were two metallic clicks, and Ada suddenly relaxed into a listless attitude of sullen tractability. She leaned panting against the side of the car as if too weak to stand alone.

Vance bent over and picked up the revolver which had fallen to the road. With a cursory glance at it he handed it to Markham.

"There's Chester's gun," he said. Then he indicated Ada with a pitying movement of the head. "Take her to your office, Markham—Van will drive the car. I'll join you there as soon as I can. I must get Sibella to a hospital."

He stepped briskly into the Daimler. There was a shifting of gears, and with a few deft manipulations he reversed the car in the narrow road.

"And watch her, Sergeant!" he flung back, as the car darted away toward Ardsley.

I drove Vance's car back to the city. Markham and Heath sat in the rear seat with the girl between them. Hardly a word was spoken during the entire hour-and-a-half's ride. Several times I glanced behind me at the silent trio. Markham and the Sergeant appeared completely stunned by the surprising truth that had just been revealed to them. Ada, huddled between them, sat apathetically with closed

eyes, her head forward. Once I noticed that she pressed a handkerchief to her face with her manacled hands; and I thought I heard the sound of smothered sobbing. But I was too nervous to pay any attention. It took every effort of my will to keep my mind on my driving.

As I drew up before the Franklin Street entrance of the Criminal Courts Building and was about to shut off the engine, a startled exclamation from Heath caused me to release the switch.

"Holy Mother o' God!" I heard him say in a hoarse voice. Then he thumped me on the back. "Get to the Beekman Street Hospital—as quick as hell, Mr. Van Dine. Damn the traffic lights! Step on it!"

Without looking round I knew what had happened. I swung the car into Centre Street again, and fairly raced for the hospital. We carried Ada into the emergency ward, Heath bawling loudly for the doctor as we passed through the door.

It was more than an hour later when Vance entered the District Attorney's office, where Markham and Heath and I were waiting. He glanced quickly round the room and then looked at our faces.

"I told you to watch her, Sergeant," he said, sinking into a chair; but there was neither reproach nor regret in his voice.

None of us spoke. Despite the effect Ada's suicide had had on us, we were waiting, with a kind of conscience-stricken anxiety, for news of the other girl whom all of us, I think, had vaguely suspected.

Vance understood our silence, and nodded reassuringly.

"Sibella's all right. I took her to the Trinity Hospital in Yonkers. A slight concussion—Ada had struck her with a box-wrench which was always kept under the front seat. She'll be out in a few days. I registered her at the hospital as Mrs. Von Blon, and then phoned her husband. I caught him at home, and he hurried out. He's with her now. Incidentally, the reason we didn't reach him at Mrs. Riglander's is because he stopped at the office for his medicine-case. That delay saved Sibella's life. Otherwise, I doubt if we'd have reached her before Ada had run her over the precipice in the machine."

He drew deeply on his cigarette for a moment. Then he lifted his eyebrows to Markham.

"Cyanide of potassium?"

Markham gave a slight start.

"Yes—or so the doctor thinks. There was a bitter-almond odor on her lips." He shot his head forward angrily. "But if you knew——"

"Oh, I wouldn't have stopped it in any case," interrupted Vance. "I discharged my wholly mythical duty to the State when I warned the Sergeant. However, I didn't know at the time. Von Blon just gave me the information. When I told him what had happened I asked him if he had ever lost any other poisons—you see, I couldn't imagine any one planning so devilish and hazardous an exploit as the Greene murders without preparing for the eventuality of failure. He told me he'd missed a tablet of cyanide from his dark-room about three months ago. And when I jogged his memory he recalled that Ada had been poking round there and asking questions a few days before. The one cyanide tab-

let was probably all she dared take at the time; so she kept it for herself in case of an emergency."*

"What I want to know, Mr. Vance," said Heath, "is how she worked this scheme. Was there any one else in on the deal?"

"No, Sergeant. Ada planned and executed every part of it."

"But how, in God's name——?"

Vance held up his hand.

"It's all very simple, Sergeant—once you have the key. What misled us was the fiendish cleverness and audacity of the plot. But there's no longer any need to speculate about it. I have a printed and bound explanation of everything that happened. And it's not a fictional or speculative explanation. It's actual criminal history, garnered and recorded by the greatest expert on the subject the world has yet known—Doctor Hans Gross, of Vienna."

He rose and took up his coat.

"I phoned Currie from the hospital, and he has a belated dinner waiting for all of us. When we have eaten, I'll present you with a reconstruction and exposition of the entire case."

* As I learned later, Doctor Von Blon, who was an ardent amateur photographer, often used half-gramme tablets of cyanide of potassium; and there had been three of them in his darkroom when Ada had called. Several days later, when preparing to redevelop a plate, he could find only two, but had thought little of the loss until questioned by Vance.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ASTOUNDING TRUTH

(Monday, December 13; 11 p. m.)

"As you know, Markham," Vance began, when we were seated about the library fire late that night, "I finally succeeded in putting together the items of my summary in such a way that I could see plainly who the murderer was.* Once I had found the basic pattern, every detail fitted perfectly into a plastic whole. The technic of the crimes, however, remained obscure; so I asked you to send for the books in Tobias's library—I was sure they would tell me what I wanted to know. First, I went through Gross's 'Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter,' which I regarded as the most likely source of information. It is an amazing treatise, Markham. It covers the entire field of the history and science of crime; and, in addition, is a compendium of criminal technic, citing specific cases and containing detailed explanations and diagrams. Small wonder it is the world's standard cyclopædia on its subject. As I read it, I found what I was looking for. Ada had copied every act of hers, every

* I later asked Vance to rearrange the items for me in the order of his final sequence. The distribution, which told him the truth, was as follows: 3, 4, 44, 92, 9, 6, 2, 47, 1, 5, 32, 31, 98, 8, 81, 84, 82, 7, 10, 11, 61, 15, 16, 93, 33, 94, 76, 75, 48, 17, 38, 55, 54, 18, 39, 56, 41, 42, 28, 43, 58, 59, 83, 74, 40, 12, 34, 13, 14, 37, 22, 23, 35, 36, 19, 73, 26, 20, 21, 45, 25, 46, 27, 29, 30, 57, 77, 24, 78, 79, 51, 50, 52, 53, 49, 95, 80, 85, 86, 87, 88, 60. 62, 64, 63, 66, 65, 96, 89, 67, 71, 69, 68, 70, 97, 90, 91, 72.

method, every device, every detail, from its pages—*from actual criminal history!* We are hardly to be blamed for our inability to combat her schemes; for it was not she alone who was deceiving us; it was the accumulated experience of hundreds of shrewd criminals before her, plus the analytic science of the world's greatest criminologist—Doctor Hans Gross."

He paused to light another cigarette.

"But even when I had found the explanation of her crimes," he continued, "I felt that there was something lacking, some fundamental *penchant*—the thing that made this orgy of horror possible and gave viability, so to speak, to her operations. We knew nothing of Ada's early life or of her progenitors and inherited instincts; and without that knowledge the crimes, despite their clear logic, were incredible. Consequently, my next step was to verify Ada's psychological and environmental sources. I had had a suspicion from the first that she was Frau Mannheim's daughter. But even when I verified this fact I couldn't see its bearing on the case. It was obvious, from our interview with Frau Mannheim, that Tobias and her husband had been in shady deals together in the old days; and she later admitted to me that her husband had died thirteen years ago, in October, at New Orleans after a year's illness in a hospital. She also said, as you may recall, that she had seen Tobias a year prior to her husband's death. This would have been fourteen years ago—just the time Ada was adopted by Tobias.* I thought there might be some connection be-

* We later learned from Mrs. Mannheim that Mannheim had once saved Tobias from criminal prosecution by taking upon himself the entire blame of one of Tobias's shadiest extra-legal

tween Mannheim and the crimes, and I even toyed with the idea that Sproot was Mannheim, and that a dirty thread of blackmail ran through the situation. So I decided to investigate. My mysterious trip last week was to New Orleans; and there I had no difficulty in learning the truth. By looking up the death records for October thirteen years ago, I discovered that Mannheim had been in an asylum for the criminally insane for a year preceding his death. And from the police I ascertained something of his record. Adolph Mannheim—Ada's father—was, it seems, a famous German criminal and murderer, who had been sentenced to death, but had escaped from the penitentiary at Stuttgart and come to America. I have a suspicion that the departed Tobias was, in some way, mixed up in that escape. But whether or not I wrong him, the fact remains that Ada's father was homicidal and a professional criminal. And therein lies the explanat'ry background of her actions. . . ."

"You mean she was crazy like her old man?" asked Heath.

"No, Sergeant. I merely mean that the potentialities of criminality had been handed down to her in her blood. When the motive for the crimes became powerful, her inherited instincts asserted themselves."

"But mere money," put in Markham, "seems hardly a strong enough motive to inspire such atrocities as hers."

transactions, and had exacted from Tobias the promise that, in event of his own death or incarceration, he would adopt and care for Ada, whom Mrs. Mannheim had placed in a private institution at the age of five, to protect her from Mannheim's influence.

"It wasn't money alone that inspired her. The real motive went much deeper. Indeed, it was perhaps the most powerful of all human motives—a strange, terrible combination of hate and love and jealousy and a desire for freedom. To begin with, she was the Cinderella in that abnormal Greene family, looked down upon, treated like a servant, made to spend her time caring for a nagging invalid, and forced—as Sibella put it—to earn her livelihood. Can you not see her for fourteen years brooding over this treatment, nourishing her resentment, absorbing the poison about her, and coming at length to despise every one in that household? That alone would have been enough to awaken her congenital instincts. One almost wonders that she did not break forth long before. But another equally potent element entered the situation. She fell in love with Von Blon—a natural thing for a girl in her position to do—and then learned that Sibella had won his affections. She either knew or strongly suspected that they were married; and her normal hatred of her sister was augmented by a vicious and eroding jealousy. . . .

"Now, Ada was the only member of the family who, according to the terms of old Tobias's will, was not compelled to live on the estate in event of marriage; and in this fact she saw a chance to snatch all the things she craved and at the same time to rid herself of the persons against whom her whole passionate nature cried out in deadly hatred. She calculated to get rid of the family, inherit the Greene millions, and set her cap for Von Blon. There was vengeance, too, as a motivating factor in all this; but

I'm inclined to think the amatory phase of the affair was the prim'ry actuating force in the series of horrors she later perpetrated. It gave her strength and courage; it lifted her into that ecstatic realm where anything seemed possible, and where she was willing to pay any price for the desired end. And there is one point I might recall parenthetically—you remember that Barton, the younger maid, told us how Ada sometimes acted like a devil and used vile language. That fact should have given me a hint; but who could have taken Barton seriously at that stage of the game? . . .

"To trace the origin of her diabolical scheme we must first consider the locked library. Alone in the house, bored, resentful, tied down—it was inevitable that this pervertedly romantic child should play Pandora. She had every opportunity of securing the key and having a duplicate made; and so the library became her retreat, her escape from the gruelling, monotonous routine of her existence. There she ran across those books on criminology. They appealed to her, not only as a vicious outlet for her smouldering, repressed hatred, but because they struck a responsive chord in her tainted nature. Eventually she came upon Gross's great manual, and thus found the entire technic of crime laid out before her, with diagrams and examples—not a handbook for examining magistrates, but a guide for a potential murderer! Slowly the idea of her gory orgy took shape. At first perhaps she only imagined, as a means of self-gratification, the application of this technic of murder to those she hated. But after a time, no doubt, the conception became real. She

saw its practical possibilities; and the terrible plot was formulated. She created this horror, and then, with her diseased imagination, she came to believe in it. Her plausible stories to us, her superb acting, her clever deceptions—all were part of this horrible fantasy she had engendered. That book of Grimm's 'Fairy-Tales'!—I should have understood. Y' see, it wasn't histrionism altogether on her part; it was a kind of demoniac possession. She lived her dream. Many young girls are like that under the stress of ambition and hatred. Constance Kent completely deceived the whole of Scotland Yard into believing in her innocence."

Vance smoked a moment thoughtfully.

"It's curious how we instinctively close our eyes to the truth when history is filled with substantiating examples of the very thing we are contemplating. The annals of crime contain numerous instances of girls in Ada's position who have been guilty of atrocious crimes. Besides the famous case of Constance Kent, there were, for example, Marie Boyer, and Madeleine Smith, and Grete Beyer.* I wonder if we'd have suspected them——"

"Keep to the present, Vance," interposed Markham impatiently. "You say Ada took all her ideas from Gross. But Gross's handbook is written in German. How did you know she spoke German well enough——?"

"That Sunday when I went to the house with Van

* An account of the cases of Madeleine Smith and Constance Kent may be found in Edmund Lester Pearson's "Murder at Smutty Nose"; and a record of Marie Boyer's case is included in H. B. Irving's "A Book of Remarkable Criminals." Grete Beyer was the last woman to be publicly executed in Germany.

I inquired of Ada if Sibella spoke German. I put my questions in such a way that she could not answer without telling me whether or not she, too, knew German well; and she even used a typical German locution—'Sibella speaks very well German'—showing that that language was almost instinctive with her. Incidentally, I wanted her to think that I suspected Sibella, so that she would not hasten matters until I returned from New Orleans. I knew that as long as Sibella was in Atlantic City she was safe from Ada."

"But what I want to know," put in Heath, "is how she killed Rex when she was sitting in Mr. Markham's office."

"Let us take things in order, Sergeant," answered Vance. "Julia was killed first because she was the manager of the establishment. With her out of the way, Ada would have a free hand. And, another thing, the death of Julia at the start fitted best into the scheme she had outlined; it gave her the most plausible setting for staging the attempted murder on herself. Ada had undoubtedly heard some mention of Chester's revolver, and after she had secured it she waited for the opportunity to strike the first blow. The propitious circumstances fell on the night of November 8; and at half past eleven, when the house was asleep, she knocked on Julia's door. She was admitted, and doubtless sat on the edge of Julia's bed telling some story to explain her late visit. Then she drew the gun from under her dressing-gown and shot Julia through the heart. Back in her own bedroom, with the lights on, she stood before the large mirror of the dressing-table, and,

holding the gun in her right hand, placed it against her left shoulder-blade at an oblique angle. The mirror and the lights were essential, for she could thus see exactly where to point the muzzle of the revolver. All this occupied the three-minute interval between the shots. Then she pulled the trigger——"

"But a girl shooting herself as a fake!" objected Heath. "It ain't natural."

"But Ada wasn't natural, Sergeant. None of the plot was natural. That was why I was so anxious to look up her family history. But as to shooting herself; that was quite logical when one considers her true character. And, as a matter of fact, there was little or no danger attaching to it. The gun was on a hair-trigger, and little pressure was needed to discharge it. A slight flesh wound was the worst she had to fear. Moreover, history is full of cases of self-mutilation where the object to be gained was far smaller than what Ada was after. Gross is full of them. . . ."

He took up Volume I of the "Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter," which lay on the table beside him, and opened it at a marked page.

"Listen to this, Sergeant. I'll translate the passage roughly as I read: '*It is not uncommon to find people who inflict wounds on themselves; such are, besides persons pretending to be the victims of assaults with deadly weapons, those who try to extort damages or blackmail. Thus it often happens that, after an insignificant scuffle, one of the combatants shows wounds which he pretends to have received. It is characteristic of these voluntary mutilations*

*that most frequently those who perform them do not quite complete the operation, and that they are for the most part people who manifest excessive piety, or lead a solitary life.'** . . . And surely, Sergeant, you are familiar with the self-mutilation of soldiers to escape service. The most common method used by them is to place their hand over the muzzle of the gun and blow their fingers off."

Vance closed the book.

"And don't forget that the girl was hopeless, desperate, and unhappy, with everything to win and nothing to lose. She would probably have committed suicide if she had not worked out the plan of the murders. A superficial wound in the shoulder meant little to her in view of what she was to gain by it. And women have an almost infinite capacity for self-immolation. With Ada, it was part of her abnormal condition.—No, Sergeant; the self-shooting was perfectly consistent in the circumstances. . . ."

"But in the back!" Heath looked dumbfounded. "That's what gets me. Whoever heard——?"

"Just a moment." Vance took up Volume II of the "Handbuch" and opened it to a marked page. "Gross, for instance, has heard of many such cases—

* "Selbstverletzungen kommen nicht selten vor; abgesehen von solchen bei fingierten Raubanfällen, stösst man auf sie dann, wenn Entschädigungen erpresst werden sollen; so geschieht es, dass nach einer harmlosen Balgerei einer der Kämpfenden mit Verletzungen auftritt, die er damals erlitten haben will. Kenntlich sind solche Selbstverstümmelungen daran, dass die Betreffenden meistens die Operation wegen der grossen Schmerzen nicht ganz zu Ende führen, und dass es meistens Leute mit übertrieben pietistischer Färbung und mehr einsamen Lebenswandels sind."—H. Gross, "Handbuch für Untersuchungsrichter als System der Kriminalistik," I, pp. 32-34.

in fact, they're quite common on the Continent. And his record of them indubitably gave Ada the idea for shooting herself in the back. Here's a single paragraph culled from many pages of similar cases: '*That you should not be deceived by the seat of the wound is proved by the following two cases. In the Vienna Prater a man killed himself in the presence of several people by shooting himself in the back of the head with a revolver. Without the testimony of several witnesses nobody would have accepted the theory of suicide. A soldier killed himself by a shot with his military rifle through the back, by fixing the rifle in a certain position and then lying down over it. Here again the position of the wound seemed to exclude the theory of suicide.*' "*

"Wait a minute!" Heath heaved himself forward and shook his cigar at Vance. "What about the gun? Sproot entered Ada's room right after the shot was fired, and there wasn't no sign of a gun!"

Vance, without answering, merely turned the pages of Gross's "Handbuch" to where another marker protruded, and began translating:

"'*Early one morning the authorities were informed that the corpse of a murdered man had been found. At the spot indicated the body was discovered of a grain merchant, A. M., supposed to be a*

* "Dass man sich durch den Sitz der Wunde niemals täuschen lassen darf, beweisen zwei Fälle. Im Wiener Prater hatte sich ein Mann in Gegenwart mehrerer Personen getötet, indem er sich mit einem Revolver in den Hinterkopf schoss. Wären nicht die Aussagen der Zeugen vorgelegen, hätte wohl kaum jemand an einen Selbstmord geglaubt. Ein Soldat tötete sich durch einen in den Rücken gehenden Schuss aus einem Militärgewehr, über das er nach entsprechender Fixierung sich gelegt hatte; auch hier wäre aus dem Sitz der Wunde wohl kaum auf Selbstmord geschlossen worden."—*Ibid.*, II, p. 843.

well-to-do man, face downward with a gunshot wound behind the ear. The bullet, after passing through the brain, had lodged in the frontal bone above the left eye. The place where the corpse was found was in the middle of a bridge over a deep stream. Just when the inquiry was concluding and the corpse was about to be removed for the post mortem, the investigating officer observed quite by chance that on the decayed wooden parapet of the bridge, almost opposite to the spot where the corpse lay, there was a small but perfectly fresh dent which appeared to have been caused by a violent blow on the upper edge of the parapet of a hard and angular object. He immediately suspected that the dent had some connection with the murder. Accordingly he determined to drag the bed of the stream below the bridge, when almost immediately there was picked up a strong cord about fourteen feet long with a large stone at one end and at the other a discharged pistol, the barrel of which fitted exactly the bullet extracted from the head of A. M. The case was thus evidently one of suicide. A. M. had hung the stone over the parapet of the bridge and discharged the pistol behind his ear. The moment he fired he let go the pistol, which the weight of the stone dragged over the parapet into the water.' . . .* Does that answer your question, Sergeant?"

* "Es wurde zeitlich morgens dem UR. die Meldung von der Auffindung eines 'Ermordeten' überbracht. An Ort und Stelle fand sich der Leichnam eines für wohlhabend geltenden Getreidehändlers M., auf dem Gesichte liegend, mit einer Schusswunde hinter dem rechten Ohre. Die Kugel war über dem linken Auge im Stirnknochen stecken geblieben, nachdem sie das Gehirn durchdrungen hatte. Die Fundstelle der Leiche befand sich etwa in der Mitte einer über einen ziemlich tiefen Fluss führenden

Heath stared at him with gaping eyes.

"You mean her gun went outa the window the same like that guy's gun went over the bridge?"

"There can be no doubt about it. There was no other place for the gun to go. The window, I learned from Sproot, was open a foot, and Ada stood before the window when she shot herself. Returning from Julia's room she attached a cord to the revolver with a weight of some kind on the other end, and hung the weight out of the window. When her hand released the weapon it was simply drawn over the sill and disappeared in the drift of soft snow on the balcony steps. And there is where the importance of the weather came in. Ada's plan needed an unusual amount of snow; and the night of November 8 was ideal for her grisly purpose."

"My God, Vance!" Markham's tone was strained

Brücke. Am Schlusse der Lokalerhebungen und als die Leiche eben zur Obduktion fortgebracht werden sollte, fiel es dem UR. zufällig auf, dass das (hölzerne und wettergraue) Brückengeländer an der Stelle, wo auf dem Boden der Leichnam lag, eine kleine und sichtlich ganz frische Beschädigung aufwies, so als ob man dort (am oberen Rande) mit einem harten, kantigen Körper heftig angestossen wäre. Der Gedanke, dass dieser Umstand mit dem Morde in Zusammenhang stehe, war nicht gut von der Hand zu weisen. Ein Kahn war bald zur Stelle und am Brückenjoche befestigt; nun wurde vom Kahne aus (unter der fraglichen Stelle) der Flussgrund mit Rechen an langen Stielen sorgfältig abgesucht. Nach kurzer Arbeit kam wirklich etwas Seltsames zutage: eine etwa 4 *m* lange starke Schnur, an deren einem Ende ein grosser Feldstein, an deren anderem Ende eine abgeschossene Pistole befestigt war, in deren Lauf die später aus dem Kopfe des M. genommene Kugel genau passte. Nun war die Sache klarer Selbstmord; der Mann hatte sich mit der aufgefundenen Vorrichtung auf die Brücke begeben, den Stein über das Brückengeländer gehängt und sich die Kugel hinter dem rechten Ohre ins Hirn gejagt. Als er getroffen war, liess er die Pistole infolge des durch den Stein bewirkten Zuges aus und diese wurde von dem schweren Steine an der Schnur über das Geländer und in das Wasser gezogen. Hierbei hatte die Pistole, als sie das Geländer passierte, heftig an dieses angeschlagen und die betreffende Verletzung erzeugt."—*Ibid.*, II, pp. 834-836.

and unnatural. "This thing begins to sound more like a fantastic nightmare than a reality."

"Not only was it a reality, Markham," said Vance gravely, "but it was an actual duplication of reality. It had all been done before and duly recorded in Gross's treatise, with names, dates, and details."

"Hell! No wonder we couldn't find the gun." Heath spoke with awed disgust. "And what about the footprints, Mr. Vance? I suppose she faked 'em all."

"Yes, Sergeant—with Gross's minute instructions and the footprint forgeries of many famous criminals to guide her, she faked them. As soon as it had stopped snowing that night, she slipped down-stairs, put on a pair of Chester's discarded galoshes, and walked to the front gate and back. Then she hid the galoshes in the library."

Vance turned once more to Gross's manual.

"There's everything here that one could possibly want to know about the making and detection of footprints, and—what is more to the point—about the manufacturing of footprints in shoes too large for one's feet.—Let me translate a short passage: '*The criminal may intend to cast suspicion upon another person, especially if he foresees that suspicion may fall upon himself. In this case he produces clear footprints which, so to speak, leap to the eyes, by wearing shoes which differ essentially from his own. One may often in this way, as has been proved by numerous experiments, produce footprints which deceive perfectly.*'* . . . And here at the end of the

* "Die Absicht kann dahin gehen, den Verdacht von sich auf jemand anderen zu wälzen, was namentlich dann Sinn hat, wenn der Täter schon im voraus annehmen durfte, dass sich der Ver-

paragraph Gross refers specifically to galoshes†—a fact which very likely gave Ada her inspiration to use Chester's overshoes. She was shrewd enough to profit by the suggestions in this passage."

"And she was shrewd enough to hoodwink all of us when we questioned her," commented Markham bitterly.

"True. But that was because she had a *folie de grandeur*, and lived the story. Moreover, it was all based on fact; its details were grounded in reality. Even the shuffling sound she said she heard in her room was an imaginative projection of the actual shuffling sound she made when she walked in Chester's huge galoshes. Also, her own shuffling, no doubt, suggested to her how Mrs. Greene's footsteps would have sounded had the old lady regained the use of her legs. And I imagine it was Ada's original purpose to cast a certain amount of suspicion on Mrs. Greene from the very beginning. But Sibella's attitude during that first interview caused her to change her tactics. As I see it, Sibella was suspicious of little sister, and talked the situation over with Chester, who may also have had vague misgivings about Ada. You remember his *sub-rosa* chat with Sibella when he went to summon her to the drawing-room. He was probably informing her that he hadn't yet made up his mind about Ada, and was

dacht auf ihn lenken werde. In diesem Falle erzeugt er recht auffallende, deutliche Spuren und zwar mit angezogenen Schuhen, die von den seinigen sich wesentlich unterscheiden. Man kann, wie angestellte Versuche beweisen, in dieser Weise recht gute Spuren erzeugen."—*Ibid.*, II, p. 667.

† "Über Gummiüberschuhe und Galoschen s. Loock; Chem. u. Phot. bei Krim. Forschungen: Düsseldorf, II, p. 56."—*Ibid.*, II, p. 668.

advising her to go easy until there was some specific proof. Sibella evidently agreed, and refrained from any direct charge until Ada, in telling her grotesque fairy-tale about the intruder, rather implied it was a woman's hand that had touched her in the dark. That was too much for Sibella, who thought Ada was referring to her; and she burst forth with her accusation, despite its seeming absurdity. The amazing thing about it was that it happened to be the truth. She named the murderer and stated a large part of the motive before any of us remotely guessed the truth, even though she did back down and change her mind when the inconsistency of it was pointed out to her. And she really did see Ada in Chester's room looking for the revolver."

Markham nodded.

"It's astonishing. But after the accusation, when Ada knew that Sibella suspected her, why didn't she kill Sibella next?"

"She was too canny. It would have tended to give weight to Sibella's accusation. Oh, Ada played her hand perfectly."

"Go on with the story, sir," urged Heath, intolerant of these side issues.

"Very well, Sergeant." Vance shifted more comfortably into his chair. "But first we must revert to the weather; for the weather ran like a sinister motif through all that followed. The second night after Julia's death it was quite warm, and the snow had melted considerably. That was the night chosen by Ada to retrieve the gun. A wound like hers rarely keeps one in bed over forty-eight hours; and

Ada was well enough on Wednesday night to slip into a coat, step out on the balcony, and walk down the few steps to where the gun lay hidden. She merely brought it back and took it to bed with her —the last place any one would have thought to look for it. Then she waited patiently for the snow to fall again—which it did the next night, stopping, as you may remember, about eleven o'clock. The stage was set. The second act of the tragedy was about to begin. . . .

"Ada rose quietly, put on her coat, and went down to the library. Getting into the galoshes, she again walked to the front gate and back. Then she went directly up-stairs so that her tracks would show on the marble steps, and hid the galoshes temporarily in the linen-closet. That was the shuffling sound and the closing door that Rex heard a few minutes before Chester was shot. Ada, you recall, told us afterward she had heard nothing; but when we repeated Rex's story to her she became frightened and conveniently remembered having heard a door close. My word! That was a ticklish moment for her. But she certainly carried it off well. And I can now understand her obvious relief when we showed her the pattern of the footprints and let her think we believed the murderer came from outside. . . . Well, after she had removed the galoshes and put them in the linen-closet, she took off her coat, donned a dressing-gown, and went to Chester's room—probably opened the door without knocking, and went in with a friendly greeting. I picture her as sitting on the arm of Chester's chair, or the edge of the desk, and then, in the midst of some trivial

remark, drawing the revolver, placing it against his breast, and pulling the trigger before he had time to recover from his horrified astonishment. He moved instinctively, though, just as the weapon exploded—which would account for the diagonal course of the bullet. Then Ada returned quickly to her own room and got into bed. Thus was another chapter written in the Greene tragedy."

"Did it strike you as strange," asked Markham, "that Von Blon was not at his office during the commission of either of the crimes?"

"At first—yes. But, after all, there was nothing unusual in the fact that a doctor should have been out at that time of night."

"It's easy enough to see how Ada got rid of Julia and Chester," grumbled Heath. "But what stops me is how she murdered Rex."

"Really, y' know, Sergeant," returned Vance, "that trick of hers shouldn't cause you any perplexity. I'll never forgive myself for not having guessed it long ago,—Ada certainly gave us enough clews to work on. But, before I describe it to you, let me recall a certain architectural detail of the Greene mansion. There is a Tudor fireplace, with carved wooden panels, in Ada's room, and another fireplace —a duplicate of Ada's—in Rex's room; and these two fireplaces are back to back on the same wall. The Greene house, as you know, is very old, and at some time in the past—perhaps when the fireplaces were built—an aperture was made between the two rooms, running from one of the panels in Ada's mantel to the corresponding panel in Rex's mantel. This miniature tunnel is about six inches square—

the exact size of te panels—and a little over two feet long, or the depth of the two mantels and the wall. It was originally used, I imagine, for private communication between the two rooms. But that point is immaterial. The fact remains that such a shaft exists—I verified it to-night on my way downtown from the hospital. I might also add that the panel at either end of the shaft is on a spring hinge, so that when it is opened and released it closes automatically, snapping back into place without giving any indication that it is anything more than a solid part of the woodwork——"

"I get you!" exclaimed Heath, with the excitement of satisfaction. "Rex was shot by the old man-killing safe idea: the burglar opens the safe door and gets a bullet in his head from a stationary gun."

"Exactly. And the same device has been used in scores of murders. In the early days out West an enemy would go to a rancher's cabin during the tenant's absence, hang a shotgun from the ceiling over the door, and tie one end of a string to the trigger and the other end to the latch. When the rancher returned—perhaps days later—his brains would be blown out as he entered his cabin; and the murderer would, at the time, be in another part of the country."

"Sure!" The Sergeant's eyes sparkled. "There was a shooting like that in Atlanta two years ago—Boscomb was the name of the murdered man. And in Richmond, Virginia——"

"There have been many instances of it, Sergeant. Gross quotes two famous Austrian cases, and also has something to say about this method in general."

Again he opened the "Handbuch."

"On page 943 Gross remarks: '*The latest American safety devices have nothing to do with the safe itself, and can in fact be used with any receptacle. They act through chemicals or automatic firing devices, and their object is to make the presence of a human being who illegally opens the safe impossible on physical grounds. The judicial question would have to be decided whether one is legally entitled to kill a burglar without further ado or damage his health. However, a burglar in Berlin in* 1902 *was shot through the forehead by a self-shooter attached to a safe in an exporting house. This style of self-shooter has also been used by murderers. A mechanic, G. Z., attached a pistol in a china-closet, fastening the trigger to the catch, and thus shot his wife when he himself was in another city. R. C., a merchant of Budapest, fastened a revolver in a humidor belonging to his brother, which, when the lid was opened, fired and sent a bullet into his brother's abdomen. The explosion jerked the box from the table, and thus exposed the mechanism before the merchant had a chance to remove it.*'* . . . In both these latter cases Gross gives a detailed description of the mechanisms employed. And it will interest you, Sergeant—in view of what I am about to tell

* "Die neuesten amerikanischen Schutzvorrichtungen haben direkt mit der Kasse selbst nichts zu tun und können eigentlich an jedem Behältnisse angebracht werden. Sie bestehen aus chemischen Schutzmitteln oder Selbstschüssen, und wollen die Anwesenheit eines Menschen, der den Schrank unbefugt geöffnet hat, aus sanitären oder sonst physischen Gründen unmöglich machen. Auch die juristische Seite der Frage ist zu erwägen, da man den Einbrecher doch nicht ohne weiteres töten oder an der Gesundheit schädigen darf. Nichtsdestoweniger wurde im Jahre 1902 ein Einbrecher in Berlin durch einen solchen Selbst-

you—to know that the revolver in the china-closet was held in place by a *Stiefelknecht*, or bootjack."

He closed the volume but held it on his lap.

"'There, unquestionably, is where Ada got the suggestion for Rex's murder. She and Rex had probably discovered the hidden passageway between their rooms years ago. I imagine that as children—they were about the same age, don't y' know—they used it as a secret means of correspondence. This would account for the name by which they both knew it—'our private mail-box.' And, given this knowledge between Ada and Rex, the method of the murder becomes perfectly clear. To-night I found an old-fashioned bootjack in Ada's clothes-closet—probably taken from Tobias's library. Its width, overall, was just six inches, and it was a little less than two feet long—it fitted perfectly into the communicating cupboard. Ada, following Gross's diagram, pressed the handle of the gun tightly between the tapering claws of the bootjack, which would have held it like a vise; then tied a string to the trigger, and attached the other end to the inside of Rex's panel, so that when the panel was opened wide the revolver, being on a hair-trigger, would discharge

schuss in die Stirne getötet, der an die Panzertüre einer Kasse befestigt war. Derartige Selbstschüsse wurden auch zu Morden verwendet; der Mechaniker G. Z. stellte einen Revolver in einer Kredenz auf, verband den Drücker mit der Türe durch eine Schnur und erschoss auf diese Art seine Frau, während er tatsächlich von seinem Wohnorte abwesend war. R. C., ein Budapester Kaufmann, befestigte in einem, seinem Bruder gehörigen Zigarrenkasten, eine Pistole, die beim Öffnen des Deckels seinen Bruder durch einen Unterleibsschuss tötlich verletzte. Der Rückschlag warf die Kiste von ihrem Standort, sodass der Mördermechanismus zu Tage trat, ehe R. C. denselben bei Seite schaffen konnte."—*Ibid.*, II, p. 943.

straight along the shaft and inevitably kill any one looking into the opening. When Rex fell with a bullet in his forehead the panel flapped back into place on its spring hinge; and a second later there was no visible evidence whatever pointing to the origin of the shot. And here we also have the explanation for Rex's calm expression of unawareness. When Ada returned with us from the District Attorney's office, she went directly to her room, removed the gun and the bootjack, hid them in her closet, and came down to the drawing-room to report the foot-tracks on her carpet—foot-tracks she herself had made before leaving the house. It was just before she came down-stairs, by the way, that she stole the morphine and strychnine from Von Blon's case."

"But, my God, Vance!" said Markham. "Suppose her mechanism had failed to work. She would have been in for it then."

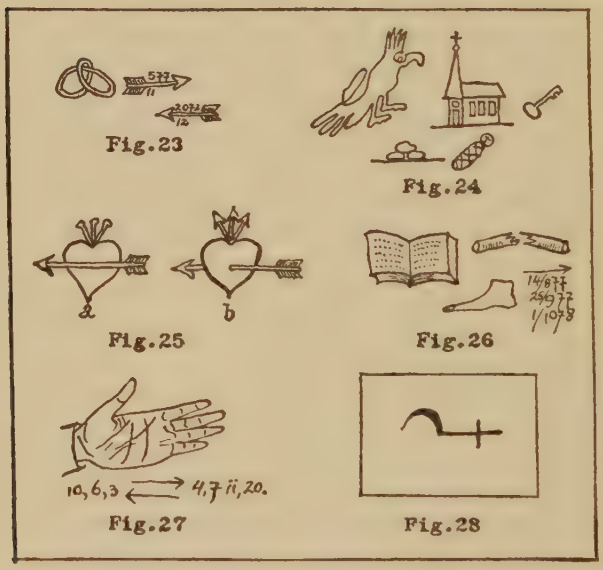
"I hardly think so. If, by any remote chance, the trap had not operated or Rex had recovered, she could easily have put the blame on some one else. She had merely to say she had secreted the diagram in the chute and that this other person had prepared the trap later on. There would have been no proof of her having set the gun."

"What about that diagram, sir?" asked Heath.

For answer Vance again took up the second volume of Gross and, opening it, extended it toward us. On the right-hand page were a number of curious line-drawings, which I reproduce here.

"There are the three stones, and the parrot, and the heart, and even your arrow, Sergeant. They're

all criminal graphic symbols; and Ada simply utilized them in her description. The story of her finding the paper in the hall was a pure fabrication, but she knew it would pique our curiosity. The truth is, I suspected the paper of being faked by some one, for it evidently contained the signs of



several types of criminal, and the symbols were meaninglessly jumbled. I rather imagined it was a false clew deliberately placed in the hall for us to find—like the footprints; but I certainly didn't suspect Ada of having made up the tale. Now, however, as I look back at the episode it strikes me as deuced queer that she shouldn't have brought so ap-

parently significant a paper to the office. Her failure to do so was neither logical nor reasonable; and I ought to have been suspicious. But—my word! —what was one illogical item more or less in such a mélange of inconsistencies? As it happened, her decoy worked beautifully, and gave her the opportunity to telephone Rex to look into the chute. But it didn't really matter. If the scheme had fallen through that morning, it would have been successful later on. Ada was highly persevering."

"You think then," put in Markham, "that Rex really heard the shot in Ada's room that first night, and confided in her?"

"Undoubtedly. That part of her story was true enough. I'm inclined to think that Rex heard the shot and had a vague idea Mrs. Greene had fired it. Being rather close to his mother temperamentally, he said nothing. Later he voiced his suspicions to Ada; and that confession gave her the idea for killing him—or, rather, for perfecting the technic she had already decided on; for Rex would have been shot through the secret cupboard in any event. But Ada now saw a way of establishing a perfect alibi for the occasion; although even her idea of being actually with the police when the shot was fired was not original. In Gross's chapter on alibis there is much suggestive material along that line."

Heath sucked his teeth wonderingly.

"I'm glad I don't run across many of her kind," he remarked.

"She was her father's daughter," said Vance. "But too much credit should not be given her, Sergeant. She had a printed and diagrammed guide

for everything. There was little for her to do but follow instructions and keep her head. And as for Rex's murder, don't forget that, although she was actually in Mr. Markham's office at the time of the shooting, she personally engineered the entire *coup*. Think back. She refused to let either you or Mr. Markham come to the house, and insisted upon visiting the office. Once there, she told her story and suggested that Rex be summoned immediately. She even went so far as to plead with us to call him by phone. Then, when we had complied, she quickly informed us of the mysterious diagram, and offered to tell Rex exactly where she had hidden it, so he could bring it with him. And we sat there calmly, listening to her send Rex to his death! Her actions at the Stock Exchange should have given me a hint; but I confess I was particularly blind that morning. She was in a state of high nervous excitement; and when she broke down and sobbed on Mr. Markham's desk after he had told her of Rex's death, her tears were quite real—only, they were not for Rex; they were the reaction from that hour of terrific tension."

"I begin to understand why no one up-stairs heard the shot," said Markham. "The revolver detonating in the wall, as it were, would have been almost completely muffled. But why should Sproot have heard it so distinctly down-stairs?"

"You remember there was a fireplace in the living-room directly beneath Ada's—Chester once told us it was rarely lighted because it wouldn't draw properly—and Sproot was in the butler's pantry just beyond. The sound of the report went downward through the flue and, as a result, was heard plainly on the lower floor."

"You said a minute ago, Mr. Vance," argued Heath, "that Rex maybe suspected the old lady. Then why should he have accused Von Blon the way he did that day he had a fit?"

"The accusation primarily, I think, was a sort of instinctive effort to drive the idea of Mrs. Greene's guilt from his own mind. Then again, as Von Blon explained, Rex was frightened after you had questioned him about the revolver, and wanted to divert suspicion from himself."

"Get on with the story of Ada's plot, Vance." This time it was Markham who was impatient.

"The rest seems pretty obvious, don't y' know. It was unquestionably Ada who was listening at the library door the afternoon we were there. She realized we had found the books and galoshes; and she had to think fast. So, when we came out, she told us the dramatic yarn of having seen her mother walking, which was sheer moonshine. She had run across those books on paralysis, d' ye see, and they had suggested to her the possibility of focussing suspicion on Mrs. Greene—the chief object of her hate. It is probably true, as Von Blon said, that the two books do not deal with actual hysterical paralysis and somnambulism, but they no doubt contain references to these types of paralysis. I rather think Ada had intended all along to kill the old lady last and have it appear as the suicide of the murderer. But the proposed examination by Oppenheimer changed all that. She learned of the examination when she heard Von Blon apprise Mrs. Greene of it on his morning visit; and, having told us of that mythical midnight promenade, she couldn't delay matters any

longer. The old lady had to die—*before Oppenheimer arrived.* And half an hour later Ada took the morphine. She feared to give Mrs. Greene the strychnine at once lest it appear suspicious. . . ."

"That's where those books on poisons come in, isn't it, Mr. Vance?" interjected Heath. "When Ada had decided to use poison on some of the family, she got all the dope she needed on the subject outa the library."

"Precisely. She herself took just enough morphine to render her unconscious—probably about two grains. And to make sure she would get immediate assistance she devised the simple trick of having Sibella's dog appear to give the alarm. Incidentally, this trick cast suspicion on Sibella. After Ada had swallowed the morphine, she merely waited until she began to feel drowsy, pulled the bell-cord, caught the tassel in the dog's teeth, and lay back. She counterfeited a good deal of her illness; but Drumm couldn't have detected her malingering even if he had been as great a doctor as he wanted us to believe; for the symptoms for all doses of morphine taken by mouth are practically the same during the first half-hour. And, once she was on her feet, she had only to watch for an opportunity of giving the strychnine to Mrs. Greene. . . ."

"It all seems too cold-blooded to be real," murmured Markham.

"And yet there has been any number of precedents for Ada's actions. Do you recall the mass murders of those three nurses, Madame Jegado, Frau Zwanzigger, and Vrouw Van der Linden? And there was Mrs. Belle Gunness, the female Bluebeard; and Ame-

lia Elizabeth Dyer, the Reading baby-farmer; and Mrs. Pearcey. Cold-blooded? Yes! But in Ada's case there was passion too. I'm inclined to believe that it takes a particularly hot flame—a fire at white heat, in fact—to carry the human heart through such a Gethsemane. However that may be, Ada watched for her chance to poison Mrs. Greene, and found it that night. The nurse went to the third floor to prepare for bed between eleven and eleven-thirty; and during that half-hour Ada visited her mother's room. Whether she suggested the citro-carbonate or Mrs. Greene herself asked for it, we'll never know. Probably the former, for Ada had always given it to her at night. When the nurse came down-stairs again Ada was already back in bed, apparently asleep, and Mrs. Greene was on the verge of her first—and, let us hope, her only—convulsion."

"Doremus's *post-mortem* report must have given her a terrific shock," commented Markham.

"It did. It upset all her calculations. Imagine her feelings when we informed her that Mrs. Greene couldn't have walked! She backed out of the danger nicely, though. The detail of the Oriental shawl, however, nearly entangled her. But even that point she turned to her own advantage by using it as a clew against Sibella."

"How do you account for Mrs. Mannheim's actions during that interview?" asked Markham. "You remember her saying it might have been she whom Ada saw in the hall."

A cloud came over Vance's face.

"I think," he said sadly, "that Frau Mannheim began to suspect her little Ada at that point. She

knew the terrible history of the girl's father, and perhaps had lived in fear of some criminal outcropping in the child."

There was a silence for several moments. Each of us was busy with his own thoughts. Then Vance continued:

"After Mrs. Greene's death, only Sibella stood between Ada and her blazing goal; and it was Sibella herself who gave her the idea for a supposedly safe way to commit the final murder. Weeks ago, on a ride Van and I took with the two girls and Von Blon, Sibella's venomous pique led her to make a foolish remark about running one's victim over a precipice in a machine; and it no doubt appealed to Ada's sense of the fitness of things that Sibella should thus suggest the means of her own demise. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Ada intended, after having killed her sister, to say that Sibella had tried to murder *her*, but that she had suspected the other's purpose and jumped from the car in time to save herself; and that Sibella had miscalculated the car's speed and been carried over the precipice. The fact that Von Blon and Van and I had heard Sibella speculate on just such a method of murder would have given weight to Ada's story. And what a neat ending it would have made—Sibella, the murderer, dead; the case closed; Ada, the inheritor of the Greene millions, free to do as she chose! And—'pon my soul, Markham!—it came very near succeeding."

Vance sighed, and reached for the decanter. After refilling our glasses he settled back and smoked moodily.

"I wonder how long this terrible plot had been

in preparation. We'll never know. Maybe years. There was no haste in Ada's preparations. Everything was worked out carefully; and she let circumstances—or, rather, opportunity—guide her. Once she had secured the revolver, it was only a question of waiting for a chance when she could make the footprints and be sure the gun would sink out of sight in the snow-drift on the balcony steps. Yes, the most essential condition of her scheme was the snow. . . . Amazin'!"

There is little more to add to this record. The truth was not given out, and the case was "shelved." The following year Tobias's will was upset by the Supreme Court in Equity—that is, the twenty-five-year domiciliary clause was abrogated in view of all that had happened at the house; and Sibella came into the entire Greene fortune. How much Markham had to do with the decision, through his influence with the Administration judge who rendered it, I don't know; and naturally I have never asked. But the old Greene mansion was, as you remember, torn down shortly afterward, and the estate sold to a realty corporation.

Mrs. Mannheim, broken-hearted over Ada's death, claimed her inheritance—which Sibella generously doubled—and returned to Germany to seek what comfort she might among the nieces and nephews with whom, according to Chester, she was constantly corresponding. Sproot went back to England. He told Vance before departing that he had long planned a cottage retreat in Surrey where he could loaf and invite his soul. I picture him now,

sitting on an ivied porch overlooking the Downs, reading his beloved Martial.

Doctor and Mrs. Von Blon, immediately after the court's decision relating to the will, sailed for the Riviera and spent a belated honeymoon there. They are now settled in Vienna, where the doctor has become a *Privatdocent* at the University—his father's Alma Mater. He is, I understand, making quite a name for himself in the field of neurology.

THE BISHOP MURDER CASE

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CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

Philo Vance

John F.-X. Markham
District Attorney of New York County.

Ernest Heath
Sergeant of the Homicide Bureau.

Professor Bertrand Dillard
A famous physicist.

Belle Dillard
His niece.

Sigurd Arnesson
His adopted son: an associate professor of mathematics.

Pyne
The Dillard butler.

Beedle
The Dillard cook.

Adolph Drukker
Scientist and author.

Mrs. Otto Drukker
His mother.

Grete Menzel
The Drukker cook.

John Pardee
Mathematician and chess expert: inventor of the Pardee gambit.

J. C. Robin
Sportsman and champion archer.

Raymond Sperling
Civil Engineer.

JOHN E. SPRIGG
Senior at Columbia University.

DR. WHITNEY BARSTEAD
An eminent neurologist.

QUINAN
Police Reporter of the *World*.

MADELEINE MOFFAT

CHIEF INSPECTOR O'BRIEN
Of the Police Department of New York City.

WILLIAM M. MORAN
Commanding Officer of the Detective Bureau.

CAPTAIN PITTS
Of the Homicide Bureau.

GUILFOYLE
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

SNITKIN
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

HENNESSEY
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

EMERY
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

BURKE
Detective of the Homicide Bureau.

CAPTAIN DUBOIS
Finger-print expert.

DR. EMANUEL DOREMUS
Medical Examiner.

SWACKER
Secretary to the District Attorney.

CURRIE
Vance's valet.

CHAPTER I

"WHO KILLED COCK ROBIN?"

(Saturday, April 2; noon)

Of all the criminal cases in which Philo Vance participated as an unofficial investigator, the most sinister, the most bizarre, the seemingly most incomprehensible, and certainly the most terrifying, was the one that followed the famous Greene murders.* The orgy of horror at the old Greene mansion had been brought to its astounding close in December; and after the Christmas holidays Vance had gone to Switzerland for the winter sports. Returning to New York at the end of February he had thrown himself into some literary work he had long had in mind—the uniform translation of the principal fragments of Menander found in the Egyptian papyri during the early years of the present century; and for over a month he had devoted himself sedulously to this thankless task.

Whether or not he would have completed the translations, even had his labors not been interrupted, I do not know; for Vance was a man of cultural ardencies, in whom the spirit of research and intellectual adventure was constantly at odds with the drudgery necessary to scholastic creation. I remember that only the preceding year he had begun writing a life

* "The Greene Murder Case" (Scribners, 1928).

of Xenophon—the result of an enthusiasm inherited from his university days when he had first read the *Anabasis* and the *Memorabilia*—and had lost interest in it at the point where Xenophon's historic march led the Ten Thousand back to the sea. However, the fact remains that Vance's translation of Menander was rudely interrupted in early April; and for weeks he became absorbed in a criminal mystery which threw the entire country into a state of gruesome excitement.

This new criminal investigation, in which he acted as a kind of *amicus curiæ* for John F.-X. Markham, the District Attorney of New York, at once became known as the Bishop murder case. The designation —the result of our journalistic instinct to attach labels to every *cause célèbre*—was, in a sense, a misnomer. There was nothing ecclesiastical about that ghoulish saturnalia of crime which set an entire community to reading the "Mother Goose Melodies" with fearful apprehension;* and no one of the name of Bishop was, as far as I know, even remotely connected with the monstrous events which bore that appellation. But, withal, the word "Bishop" was appropriate, for it was an *alias* used by the murderer for the grimmest of purposes. Incidentally it was this name that eventually led Vance to the almost incredible truth, and ended one of the most ghastly multiple crimes in police history.

The series of uncanny and apparently unrelated

* Mr. Joseph A. Margolies of Brentano's told me that for a period of several weeks during the Bishop murder case more copies of "Mother Goose Melodies" were sold than of any current novel. And one of the smaller publishing houses reprinted and completely sold out an entire edition of those famous old nursery rhymes.

events which constituted the Bishop murder case and drove all thought of Menander and Greek monostichs from Vance's mind, began on the morning of April 2, less than five months after the double shooting of Julia and Ada Greene. It was one of those warm luxurious spring days which sometimes bless New York in early April; and Vance was breakfasting in his little roof garden atop his apartment in East 38th Street. It was nearly noon—for Vance worked or read until all hours, and was a late riser—and the sun, beating down from a clear blue sky, cast a mantle of introspective lethargy over the city. Vance sprawled in an easy chair, his breakfast on a low table beside him, gazing with cynical, regretful eyes down at the treetops in the rear yard.

I knew what was in his mind. It was his custom each spring to go to France; and it had long since come to him to think, as it came to George Moore, that Paris and May were one. But the great trek of the post-war American *nouveaux riches* to Paris had spoiled his pleasure in this annual pilgrimage; and, only the day before, he had informed me that we were to remain in New York for the summer.

For years I had been Vance's friend and legal adviser—a kind of monetary steward and agent-companion. I had quitted my father's law firm of Van Dine, Davis & Van Dine to devote myself wholly to his interests—a post I found far more congenial than that of general attorney in a stuffy office—and though my own bachelor quarters were in a hotel on the West Side, I spent most of my time at Vance's apartment.

I had arrived early that morning, long before

Vance was up, and, having gone over the first-of-the-month accounts, now sat smoking my pipe idly as he breakfasted.

"Y' know, Van," he said to me, in his emotionless drawl; "the prospect of spring and summer in New York is neither excitin' nor romantic. It's going to be a beastly bore. But it'll be less annoyin' than travelin' in Europe with the vulgar hordes of tourists jostlin' one at every turn. . . . It's very distressin'."

Little did he suspect what the next few weeks held in store for him. Had he known I doubt if even the prospect of an old pre-war spring in Paris would have taken him away; for his insatiable mind liked nothing better than a complicated problem; and even as he spoke to me that morning the gods that presided over his destiny were preparing for him a strange and fascinating enigma—one which was to stir the nation deeply and add a new and terrible chapter to the annals of crime.

Vance had scarcely poured his second cup of coffee when Currie, his old English butler and general factotum, appeared at the French doors bearing a portable telephone.

"It's Mr. Markham, sir," the old man said apologetically. "As he seemed rather urgent, I took the liberty of informing him you were in." He plugged the telephone into a baseboard switch, and set the instrument on the breakfast table.

"Quite right, Currie," Vance murmured, taking off the receiver. "Anything to break this deuced monotony." Then he spoke to Markham. "I say, old man, don't you ever sleep? I'm in the midst of

an *omelette aux fines herbes*. Will you join me? Or do you merely crave the music of my voice——?"

He broke off abruptly, and the bantering look on his lean features disappeared. Vance was a marked Nordic type, with a long, sharply chiselled face; gray, wide-set eyes; a narrow aquiline nose; and a straight oval chin. His mouth, too, was firm and clean-cut, but it held a look of cynical cruelty which was more Mediterranean than Nordic. His face was strong and attractive, though not exactly handsome. It was the face of a thinker and recluse; and its very severity—at once studious and introspective—acted as a barrier between him and his fellows.

Though he was immobile by nature and sedulously schooled in the repression of his emotions, I noticed that, as he listened to Markham on the phone that morning, he could not entirely disguise his eager interest in what was being told him. A slight frown ruffled his brow; and his eyes reflected his inner amazement. From time to time he gave vent to a murmured "Amazin'!" or "My word!" or "Most extr'ordin'ry!"—his favorite expletives—and when at the end of several minutes he spoke to Markham, a curious excitement marked his manner.

"Oh, by all means!" he said. "I shouldn't miss it for all the lost comedies of Menander. . . . It sounds mad. . . . I'll don fitting raiment immediately. . . . *Au revoir*."

Replacing the receiver, he rang for Currie.

"My gray tweeds," he ordered. "A sombre tie, and my black Homburg hat." Then he returned to his omelet with a preoccupied air.

After a few moments he looked at me quizzically.

"What might you know of archery, Van?" he asked.

I knew nothing of archery, save that it consisted of shooting arrows at targets, and I confessed as much.

"You're not exactly revealin', don't y' know." He lighted one of his *Régie* cigarettes indolently. "However, we're in for a little flutter of toxophily, it seems. I'm no leading authority on the subject myself, but I did a bit of potting with the bow at Oxford. It's not a passionately excitin' pastime—much duller than golf and fully as complicated." He smoked a while dreamily. "I say, Van; fetch me Doctor Elmer's tome on archery from the library—there's a good chap."*

I brought the book, and for nearly half an hour he dipped into it, tarrying over the chapters on archery associations, tournaments and matches, and scanning the long tabulation of the best American scores. At length he settled back in his chair. It was obvious he had found something that caused him troubled concern and set his sensitive mind to work.

"It's quite mad, Van," he remarked, his eyes in space. "A mediæval tragedy in modern New York! We don't wear buskins and leathern doublets, and yet—*By Jove!*" He suddenly sat upright. "No—no! It's absurd. I'm letting the insanity of Markham's news affect me. . . ." He drank some more coffee, but his expression told me that he could not rid himself of the idea that had taken possession of him.

* The book Vance referred to was that excellent and comprehensive treatise, "Archery," by Robert P. Elmer, M.D.

"One more favor, Van," he said at length. "Fetch me my German diction'ry and Burton E. Stevenson's 'Home Book of Verse.' "

When I had brought the volumes, he glanced at one word in the dictionary, and pushed the book from him.

"That's that, unfortunately—though I knew it all the time."

Then he turned to the section in Stevenson's gigantic anthology which included the rhymes of the nursery and of childhood. After several minutes he closed that book, too, and, stretching himself out in his chair, blew a long ribbon of smoke toward the awning overhead.

"It can't be true," he protested, as if to himself. "It's too fantastic, too fiendish, too utterly distorted. A fairy tale in terms of blood—a world in anamorphosis—a perversion of all rationality. . . . It's unthinkable, senseless, like black magic and sorcery and thaumaturgy. It's downright demented."

He glanced at his watch and, rising, went indoors, leaving me to speculate vaguely on the cause of his unwonted perturbation. A treatise on archery, a German dictionary, a collection of children's verses, and Vance's incomprehensible utterances regarding insanity and fantasy—what possible connection could these things have? I attempted to find a least common denominator, but without the slightest success. And it was no wonder I failed. Even the truth, when it came out weeks later bolstered up by an array of incontestable evidence, seemed too incredible and too wicked for acceptance by the normal mind of man.

Vance shortly broke in on my futile speculations.

He was dressed for the street, and seemed impatient at Markham's delay in arriving.

"Y' know, I wanted something to interest me—a nice fascinatin' crime, for instance," he remarked; "but—my word!—I wasn't exactly longin' for a nightmare. If I didn't know Markham so well I'd suspect him of spoofing."

When Markham stepped into the roof garden a few minutes later it was only too plain that he had been in deadly earnest. His expression was sombre and troubled, and his usual cordial greeting he reduced to the merest curt formality. Markham and Vance had been intimate friends for fifteen years. Though of antipodal natures—the one sternly aggressive, brusque, forthright, and almost ponderously serious; the other whimsical, cynical, debonair, and aloof from the transient concerns of life—they found in each other that attraction of complementaries which so often forms the basis of an inseparable and enduring companionship.

During Markham's year and four months as District Attorney of New York he had often called Vance into conference on matters of grave importance, and in every instance Vance had justified the confidence placed in his judgments. Indeed, to Vance almost entirely belongs the credit for solving the large number of major crimes which occurred during Markham's four years' incumbency. His knowledge of human nature, his wide reading and cultural attainments, his shrewd sense of logic, and his *flair* for the hidden truth beneath misleading exteriors, all fitted him for the task of criminal investigator—a task which he fulfilled unofficially in connection with the cases which came under Markham's jurisdiction.

Vance's first case, it will be remembered, had to do with the murder of Alvin Benson;* and had it not been for his participation in that affair I doubt if the truth concerning it would ever have come to light. Then followed the notorious strangling of Margaret Odell†—a murder mystery in which the ordinary methods of police detection would inevitably have failed. And last year the astounding Greene murders (to which I have already referred) would undoubtedly have succeeded had not Vance been able to frustrate their final intent.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Markham should have turned to Vance at the very beginning of the Bishop murder case. More and more, I had noticed, he had come to rely on the other's help in his criminal investigations; and in the present instance it was particularly fortunate that he appealed to Vance, for only through an intimate knowledge of the abnormal psychological manifestations of the human mind, such as Vance possessed, could that black, insensate plot have been contravened and the perpetrator unearthed.

"This whole thing may be a mare's-nest," said Markham, without conviction. "But I thought you might want to come along. . . ."

"Oh, quite!" Vance gave Markham a sardonic smile. "Sit down a moment and tell me the tale coherently. The corpse won't run away. And it's best to get our facts in some kind of order before we view the remains.—Who are the parties of the first part, for instance? And why the projection of the District Attorney's office into a murder case within an

* "The Benson Murder Case" (Scribners, 1926).
† "The 'Canary' Murder Case" (Scribners, 1927).

hour of the deceased's passing? All that you've told me so far resolves itself into the utterest nonsense."

Markham sat down gloomily on the edge of a chair and inspected the end of his cigar.

"Damn it, Vance! Don't start in with a mysteries-of-Udolpho attitude. The crime—if it is a crime—seems clear-cut enough. It's an unusual method of murder, I'll admit; but it's certainly not senseless. Archery has become quite a fad of late. Bows and arrows are in use to-day in practically every city and college in America."

"Granted. But it's been a long time since they were used to kill persons named Robin."

Markham's eyes narrowed, and he looked at Vance searchingly.

"That idea occurred to you, too, did it?"

"Occurred to me? It leapt to my brain the moment you mentioned the victim's name." Vance puffed a moment on his cigarette. "'Who Killed Cock Robin?' And with a bow and arrow! . . . Queer how the doggerel learned in childhood clings to the memory.—By the by, what was the unfortunate Mr. Robin's first name?"

"Joseph, I believe."

"Neither edifyin' nor suggestive. . . . Any middle name?"

"See here, Vance!" Markham rose irritably. "What has the murdered man's middle name to do with the case?"

"I haven't the groggiest. Only, as long as we're going insane we may as well go the whole way. A mere shred of sanity is of no value."

He rang for Currie and sent him for the tele-

phone directory. Markham protested, but Vance pretended not to hear; and when the directory arrived he thumbed its pages for several moments.

"Did the departed live on Riverside Drive?" he asked finally, holding his finger on a name he had found.

"I think he did."

"Well, well." Vance closed the book, and fixed a quizzically triumphant gaze on the District Attorney. "Markham," he said slowly, "there's only one Joseph Robin listed in the telephone direct'ry. He lives on Riverside Drive, and his middle name is—Cochrane!"

"What rot is this?" Markham's tone was almost ferocious. "Suppose his name *was* Cochrane: are you seriously suggesting that the fact had anything to do with his being murdered?"

"'Pon my word, old man, I'm suggesting nothing." Vance shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I'm merely jotting down, so to speak, a few facts in connection with the case. As the matter stands now: a Mr. Joseph Cochrane Robin—to wit: Cock Robin—has been killed by a bow and arrow.—Doesn't that strike even your legal mind as deuced queer?"

"No!" Markham fairly spat the negative. "The name of the dead man is certainly common enough; and it's a wonder more people haven't been killed or injured with all this revival of archery throughout the country. Moreover, it's wholly possible that Robin's death was the result of an accident."

"Oh, my aunt!" Vance wagged his head reprovingly. "That fact, even were it true, wouldn't help the situation any. It would only make it queerer.

Of the thousands of archery enthusiasts in these fair states, the one with the name of Cock Robin should be accidentally killed with an arrow! Such a supposition would lead us into spiritism and demonology and whatnot. Do you, by any chance, believe in Eblises and Azazels and jinn who go about playing Satanic jokes on mankind?"

"Must I be a Mohammedan mythologist to admit coincidences?" returned Markham tartly.

"My dear fellow! The proverbial long arm of coincidence doesn't extend to infinity. There are, after all, laws of probability, based on quite definite mathematical formulas. It would make me sad to think that such men as Laplace* and Czuber and von Kries had lived in vain.—The present situation, however, is even more complicated than you suspect. For instance, you mentioned over the phone that the last person known to have been with Robin before his death is named Sperling."

"And what esoteric significance lies in that fact?"

"Perhaps you know what *Sperling* means in German," suggested Vance dulcetly.

"I've been to High School," retorted Markham. Then his eyes opened slightly, and his body became tense.

Vance pushed the German dictionary toward him.

"Well, anyway, look up the word. We might as well be thorough. I looked it up myself. I was afraid my imagination was playing tricks on me,

* Though Laplace is best known for his "Méchanique Céleste," Vance was here referring to his masterly work, "Théorie Analytique des Probabilités," which Herschel called "the ne plus ultra of mathematical skill and power."

and I had a yearnin' to see the word in black and white."

Markham opened the book in silence, and let his eye run down the page. After staring at the word for several moments he drew himself up resolutely, as if fighting off a spell. When he spoke his voice was defiantly belligerent.

"*Sperling* means 'sparrow.' Any school boy knows that. What of it?"

"Oh, to be sure." Vance lit another cigarette languidly. "And any school boy knows the old nursery rhyme entitled 'The Death and Burial of Cock Robin,' what?" He glanced tantalizingly at Markham, who stood immobile, staring out into the spring sunshine. "Since you pretend to be unfamiliar with that childhood classic, permit me to recite the first stanza."

A chill, as of some unseen spectral presence, passed over me as Vance repeated those old familiar lines:

"Who killed Cock Robin?
'I,' said the sparrow,
'With my bow and arrow.
I killed Cock Robin.'"

CHAPTER II

ON THE ARCHERY RANGE

(Saturday, April 2; 12.30 p. m.)

Slowly Markham brought his eyes back to Vance.

"It's mad," he remarked, like a man confronted with something at once inexplicable and terrifying.

"Tut, tut!" Vance waved his hand airily. "That's plagiarism. I said it first." (He was striving to overcome his own sense of perplexity by a lightness of attitude.) "And now there really should be an *inamorata* to bewail Mr. Robin's passing. You recall, perhaps, the stanza:

> "Who'll be chief mourner?
> 'I,' said the dove,
> 'I mourn my lost love;
> I'll be chief mourner.' "

Markham's head jerked slightly, and his fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the table.

"Good God, Vance! There *is* a girl in the case. And there's a possibility that jealousy lies at the bottom of this thing."

"Fancy that, now! I'm afraid the affair is going to develop into a kind of *tableau-vivant* for grown-up kindergartners, what? But that'll make our task easier. All we'll have to do is to find the fly."

"The fly?"

"The *Musca domestica*, to speak pedantically. . . . My dear Markham, have you forgotten?——

"Who saw him die?
'I,' said the fly,
'With my little eye;
I saw him die.' "

"Come down to earth!" Markham spoke with acerbity. "This isn't a child's game. It's damned serious business."

Vance nodded abstractedly.

"A child's game is sometimes the most serious business in life." His words held a curious, far-away tone. "I don't like this thing—I don't at all like it. There's too much of the child in it—the child born old and with a diseased mind. It's like some hideous perversion." He took a deep inhalation on his cigarette, and made a slight gesture of repugnance. "Give me the details. Let's find out where we stand in this topsy-turvy land."

Markham again seated himself.

"I haven't many details. I told you practically everything I know of the case over the phone. Old Professor Dillard called me shortly before I communicated with you——"

"Dillard? By any chance, Professor Bertrand Dillard?"

"Yes. The tragedy took place at his house.—You know him?"

"Not personally. I know him only as the world of science knows him—as one of the greatest living mathematical physicists. I have most of his books. —How did he happen to call you?"

"I've known him for nearly twenty years. I had mathematics under him at Columbia, and later did some legal work for him. When Robin's body was found he phoned me at once—about half past eleven. I called up Sergeant Heath at the Homicide Bureau and turned the case over to him—although I told him I'd come along personally later on. Then I phoned you. The Sergeant and his men are waiting for me now at the Dillard home."

"What's the domestic situation there?"

"The professor, as you probably know, resigned his chair some ten years ago. Since then he's been living in West 75th Street, near the Drive. He took his brother's child—a girl of fifteen—to live with him. She's around twenty-five now. Then there's his protégé, Sigurd Arnesson, who was a classmate of mine at college. The professor adopted him during his junior year. Arnesson is now about forty, an instructor in mathematics at Columbia. He came to this country from Norway when he was three, and was left an orphan five years later. He's something of a mathematical genius, and Dillard evidently saw the makings of a great physicist in him and adopted him."

"I've heard of Arnesson," nodded Vance. "He recently published some modifications of Mie's theory on the electrodynamics of moving bodies. . . . And do these three—Dillard, Arnesson and the girl—live alone?"

"With two servants. Dillard appears to have a very comfortable income. They're not very much alone, however. The house is a kind of shrine for mathematicians, and quite a *cénacle* has developed.

Moreover, the girl, who has always gone in for outdoor sports, has her own little social set. I've been at the house several times, and there have always been visitors about—either a serious student or two of the abstract sciences up-stairs in the library, or some noisy young people in the drawing-room below."

"And Robin?"

"He belonged to Belle Dillard's set—an oldish young society man who held several archery records. . . ."

"Yes, I know. I just looked up the name in this book on archery. A Mr. J. C. Robin seems to have made the high scores in several recent championship meets. And I noted, too, that a Mr. Sperling has been the runner-up in several large archery tournaments. —Is Miss Dillard an archer as well?"

"Yes, quite an enthusiast. In fact, she organized the Riverside Archery Club. Its permanent ranges are at Sperling's home in Scarsdale; but Miss Dillard has rigged up a practice range in the side yard of the professor's 75th-Street house. It was on this range that Robin was killed."

"Ah! And, as you say, the last person known to have been with him was Sperling. Where is our sparrow now?"

"I don't know. He was with Robin shortly before the tragedy; but when the body was found he had disappeared. I imagine Heath will have news on that point."

"And wherein lies the possible motive of jealousy you referred to?" Vance's eyelids had drooped lazily, and he smoked with leisurely but precise deliberation—a sign of his intense interest in what was being told him.

"Professor Dillard mentioned an attachment between his niece and Robin; and when I asked him who Sperling was and what his status was at the Dillard house, he intimated that Sperling was also a suitor for the girl's hand. I didn't go into the situation over the phone, but the impression I got was that Robin and Sperling were rivals, and that Robin had the better of it."

"And so the sparrow killed Cock Robin." Vance shook his head dubiously. "It won't do. It's too dashed simple; and it doesn't account for the fiendishly perfect reconstruction of the Cock-Robin rhyme. There's something deeper—something darker and more horrible—in this grotesque business.—Who, by the by, found Robin?"

"Dillard himself. He had stepped out on the little balcony at the rear of the house, and saw Robin lying below on the practice range, with an arrow through his heart. He went down-stairs immediately—with considerable difficulty, for the old man suffers abominably from gout—and, seeing that the man was dead, phoned me.—That's all the advance information I have."

"Not what you'd call a blindin' illumination, but still a bit suggestive." Vance got up. "Markham old dear, prepare for something rather bizarre—and damnable. We can rule out accidents and coincidence. While it's true that ordin'ry target arrows —which are made of soft wood and fitted with little bevelled piles—could easily penetrate a person's clothing and chest wall, even when driven with a medium weight bow, the fact that a man named 'Sparrow' should kill a man named Cochrane Robin, *with a bow*

and arrow, precludes any haphazard concatenation of circumstances. Indeed, this incredible set of events proves conclusively that there has been a subtle, diabolical intent beneath the whole affair." He moved toward the door. "Come, let us find out something more about it at what the Austrian police officials eruditely call the *situs criminis*."

We left the house at once and drove up-town in Markham's car. Entering Central Park at Fifth Avenue we emerged through the 72nd-Street gate, and a few minutes later were turning off of West End Avenue into 75th Street. The Dillard house—number 391—was on our right, far down the block toward the river. Between it and the Drive, occupying the entire corner, was a large fifteen-story apartment house. The professor's home seemed to nestle, as if for protection, in the shadow of this huge structure.

The Dillard house was of gray, weather-darkened limestone, and belonged to the days when homes were built for permanency and comfort. The lot on which it stood had a thirty-five-foot frontage, and the house itself was fully twenty-five feet across. The other ten feet of the lot, which formed an areaway separating the house from the apartment structure, was shut off from the street by a ten-foot stone wall with a large iron door in the centre.

The house was of modified Colonial architecture. A short flight of shallow steps led from the street to a narrow brick-lined porch adorned with four white Corinthian pillars. On the second floor a series of casement windows, paned with rectangular leaded glass, extended across the entire width of the house.

(These, I learned later, were the windows of the library.) There was something restful and distinctly old-fashioned about the place: it appeared like anything but the scene of a gruesome murder.

Two police cars were parked near the entrance when we drove up, and a dozen or so curious onlookers had gathered in the street. A patrolman lounged against one of the fluted columns of the porch, gazing at the crowd before him with bored disdain.

An old butler admitted us and led us into the drawing-room on the left of the entrance hall, where we found Sergeant Ernest Heath and two other men from the Homicide Bureau. The Sergeant, who was standing beside the centre-table smoking, his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his waistcoat, came forward and extended his hand in a friendly greeting to Markham.

"I'm glad you got here, sir," he said; and the worried look in his cold blue eyes seemed to relax a bit. "I've been waiting for you. There's something damn fishy about this case."

He caught sight of Vance, who had paused in the background, and his broad pugnacious features crinkled in a good-natured grin.

"Howdy, Mr. Vance. I had a sneaking idea you'd be lured into this case. What you been up to these many moons?" I could not help comparing this genuine friendliness of the Sergeant's attitude with the hostility of his first meeting with Vance at the time of the Benson case. But much water had run under the bridge since that first encounter in the murdered Alvin's garish living-room; and between Heath and Vance there had grown up a warm attachment, based

on a mutual respect and a frank admiration for each other's capabilities.

Vance held out his hand, and a smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"The truth is, Sergeant, I've been endeavorin' to discover the lost glories of an Athenian named Menander, a dramatic rival of Philemon's. Silly, what?"

Heath grunted disdainfully.

"Well, anyhow, if you're as good at it as you are at discovering crooks, you'll probably get a conviction." It was the first compliment I had ever heard pass his lips, and it attested not only to his deep-seated admiration for Vance, but also to his own troubled and uncertain state of mind.

Markham sensed the Sergeant's mental insecurity, and asked somewhat abruptly: "Just what seems to be the difficulty in the present case?"

"I didn't say there was any difficulty, sir," Heath replied. "It looks as though we had the bird who did it dead to rights. But I ain't satisfied, and—oh, hell! Mr. Markham . . . it ain't natural; it don't make sense."

"I think I understand what you mean." Markham regarded the Sergeant appraisingly. "You're inclined to think that Sperling's guilty?"

"Sure, he's guilty," declared Heath with overemphasis. "But that's not what's worrying me. To tell you the truth, I don't like the name of this guy who was croaked—especially as he was croaked with a bow and arrow. . . ." He hesitated, a bit shamefaced. "Don't it strike you as peculiar, sir?"

Markham nodded perplexedly.

"I see that you, too, remember your nursery rhymes," he said, and turned away.

Vance fixed a waggish look on Heath.

"You referred to Mr. Sperling just now as a 'bird,' Sergeant. The designation was most apt. *Sperling*, d' ye see, means 'sparrow' in German. And it was a sparrow, you recall, who killed Cock Robin with an arrow. . . . A fascinatin' situation—eh, what?"

The Sergeant's eyes bulged slightly, and his lips fell apart. He stared at Vance with almost ludicrous bewilderment.

"I said this here business was fishy!"

"I'd say, rather, it was avian, don't y' know."

"You *would* call it something nobody'd understand," Heath retorted truculently. It was his wont to become bellicose when confronted with the inexplicable.

Markham intervened diplomatically.

"Let's have the details of the case, Sergeant. I take it you've questioned the occupants of the house."

"Only in a general way, sir." Heath flung one leg over the corner of the centre-table and relit his dead cigar. "I've been waiting for you to show up. I knew you were acquainted with the old gentleman up-stairs; so I just did the routine things. I put a man out in the alley to see that nobody touches the body till Doc Doremus arrives,*—he'll be here when he finishes lunch.—I phoned the finger-print men before I left the office, and they oughta be on the job any minute now; though I don't see what good they can do. . . ."

"What about the bow that fired the arrow?" put in Vance.

"That was our one best bet; but old Mr. Dillard

* Heath was referring to Doctor Emanuel Doremus, the Chief Medical Examiner of New York.

said he picked it up from the alley and brought it in the house. He probably gummed up any prints it mighta had."

"What have you done about Sperling?" asked Markham.

"I got his address—he lives in a country house up Westchester way—and sent a coupla men to bring him here as soon as they could lay hands on him. Then I talked to the two servants—the old fellow that let you in, and his daughter, a middle-aged woman who does the cooking. But neither of 'em seemed to know anything, or else they're acting dumb.—After that I tried to question the young lady of the house." The Sergeant raised his hands in a gesture of irritated despair. "But she was all broke up and crying; so I thought I'd let *you* have the pleasure of interviewing her.—Snitkin and Burke"—he jerked his thumb toward the two detectives by the front window—"went over the basement and the alley and back yard trying to pick up something; but drew a blank.—And that's all I know so far. As soon as Doremus and the finger-print men get here, and after I've had a heart-to-heart talk with Sperling, then I'll get the ball to rolling and clean up the works."

Vance heaved an audible sigh.

"You're so sanguine, Sergeant! Don't be disappointed if your ball turns out to be a parallelopiped that won't roll. There's something deuced oddish about this nursery extravaganza; and, unless all the omens deceive me, you'll be playing blind-man's-buff for a long time to come."

"Yeh?" Heath gave Vance a look of despondent shrewdness. It was evident he was more or less of the same opinion.

"Don't let Mr. Vance dishearten you, Sergeant," Markham rallied him. "He's permitting his imagination to run away with him." Then with an impatient gesture he turned toward the door. "Let's look over the ground before the others arrive. Later I'll have a talk with Professor Dillard and the other members of the household. And, by the way, Sergeant, you didn't mention Mr. Arnesson. Isn't he at home?"

"He's at the university; but he's expected to return soon."

Markham nodded and followed the Sergeant into the main hall. As we passed down the heavily-carpeted passage to the rear, there was a sound on the staircase, and a clear but somewhat tremulous woman's voice spoke from the semi-darkness above.

"Is that you, Mr. Markham? Uncle thought he recognized your voice. He's waiting for you in the library."

"I'll join your uncle in a very few minutes, Miss Dillard." Markham's tone was paternal and sympathetic. "And please wait with him, for I want to see you, too."

With a murmured acquiescence, the girl disappeared round the head of the stairs.

We moved on to the rear door of the lower hall. Beyond was a narrow passageway terminating in a flight of wooden steps which led to the basement. At the foot of these steps we came into a large, low-ceilinged room with a door giving directly upon the areaway at the west side of the house. This door was slightly ajar, and in the opening stood the man from the Homicide Bureau whom Heath had set to guard the body.

The room had obviously once been a basement storage; but it had been altered and redecorated, and now served as a sort of club-room. The cement floor was covered with fibre rugs, and one entire wall was painted with a panorama of archers throughout the ages. In an oblong panel on the left was a huge illustrated reproduction of an archery range labelled "Ayme for Finsburie Archers—London 1594," showing Bloody House Ridge in one corner, Westminster Hall in the centre, and Welsh Hall in the foreground. There were a piano and a phonograph in the room; numerous comfortable wicker chairs; a varicolored divan; an enormous wicker centre-table littered with all manner of sports magazines; and a small bookcase filled with works on archery. Several targets rested in one corner, their gold discs and concentric chromatic rings making brilliant splashes of color in the sunlight which flooded in from the two rear windows. One wall space near the door was hung with long bows of varying sizes and weights; and near them was a large old-fashioned tool-chest. Above it was suspended a small cupboard, or ascham, strewn with various odds and ends of tackle, such as bracers, shooting-gloves, piles, points of aim, and bow strings. A large oak panel between the door and the west window contained a display of one of the most interesting and varied collections of arrows I had ever seen.

This panel attracted Vance particularly, and adjusting his monocle carefully, he strolled over to it.

"Hunting and war arrows," he remarked. "Most inveiglin'. . . . *Ah!* One of the trophies seems to have disappeared. Taken down with considerable

haste, too. The little brass brad that held it in place is shockingly bent."

On the floor stood several quivers filled with target arrows. He leaned over and, withdrawing one, extended it to Markham.

"This frail shaft may not look as if it would penetrate the human breast; but target arrows will drive entirely through a deer at eighty yerds. . . . Why, then, the missing hunting arrow from the panel? An interestin' point."

Markham frowned and compressed his lips; and I realized that he had been clinging to the forlorn hope that the tragedy might have been an accident. He tossed the arrow hopelessly on a chair, and walked toward the outer door.

"Let's take a look at the body and the lie of the land," he said gruffly.

As we emerged into the warm spring sunlight a sense of isolation came over me. The narrow paved areaway in which we stood seemed like a canyon between steep stone walls. It was four or five feet below the street level, which was reached by a short flight of steps leading to the gate in the wall. The blank, windowless rear wall of the apartment house opposite extended upwards for 150 feet; and the Dillard house itself, though only four stories high, was the equivalent of six stories gauged by the architectural measurements of to-day. Though we were standing out of doors in the heart of New York, no one could see us except from the few side windows of the Dillard house and from a single bay window of the house on 76th Street, whose rear yard adjoined that of the Dillard grounds.

This other house, we were soon to learn, was owned by a Mrs. Drukker; and it was destined to play a vital and tragic part in the solution of Robin's murder. Several tall willow trees acted as a mask to its rear windows; and only the bay window at the side of the house had an unobstructed view of that part of the areaway in which we stood.

I noticed that Vance had his eye on this bay window, and as he studied it I saw a flicker of interest cross his face. It was not until much later that afternoon that I was able to guess what had caught and held his attention.

The archery range extended from the wall of the Dillard lot on 75th Street all the way to a similar street wall of the Drukker lot on 76th Street, where a butt of hay bales had been erected on a shallow bed of sand. The distance between the two walls was 200 feet, which, as I learned later, made possible a sixty-yard range, thus permitting target practice for all the standard archery events, with the one exception of the York Round for men.

The Dillard lot was 135 feet deep, the depth of the Drukker lot therefore being sixty-five feet. A section of the tall ironwork fence that separated the two rear yards had been removed where it had once transected the space now used for the archery range. At the further end of the range, backing against the western line of the Drukker property, was another tall apartment house occupying the corner of 76th Street and Riverside Drive. Between these two gigantic buildings ran a narrow alleyway, the range end of which was closed with a high board fence in which had been set a small door with a lock.

For purposes of clarity I am incorporating in this record a diagram of the entire scene; for the arrangement of the various topographical and architectural details had a very important bearing on the solution of the crime. I would call attention particularly to the following points:—first, to the little second-story balcony at the rear of the Dillard house, which projects slightly over the archery range; secondly, to the bay window (on the second floor) of the Drukker house, whose southern angle has a view of the entire archery range toward 75th Street; and thirdly, to the alleyway between the two apartment houses, which leads from Riverside Drive into the Dillard rear yard.

The body of Robin lay almost directly outside of the archery-room door. It was on its back, the arms extended, the legs slightly drawn up, the head pointing toward the 76th-Street end of the range. Robin had been a man of perhaps thirty-five, of medium height, and with an incipient corpulency. There was a rotund puffiness to his face, which was smooth-shaven except for a narrow blond moustache. He was clothed in a two-piece sport suit of light gray flannel, a pale-blue silk shirt, and tan Oxfords with thick rubber soles. His hat—a pearl-colored felt fedora—was lying near his feet.

Beside the body was a large pool of coagulated blood which had formed in the shape of a huge pointing hand. But the thing which held us all in a spell of fascinated horror was the slender shaft that extended vertically from the left side of the dead man's breast. The arrow protruded perhaps twenty inches, and where it had entered the body there was the large

dark stain of the hemorrhage. What made this strange murder seem even more incongruous were the beautifully fletched feathers on the arrow. They had been dyed a bright red; and about the shaftment were two stripes of turquoise blue—giving the arrow a gala appearance. I had a feeling of unreality about the tragedy, as though I were witnessing a scene in a sylvan play for children.

Vance stood looking down at the body with half-closed eyes, his hands in his coat pockets. Despite the apparent indolence of his attitude I could tell that he was keenly alert, and that his mind was busy co-ordinating the factors of the scene before him.

"Dashed queer, that arrow," he commented. "Designed for big game; . . . undoubtedly belongs to that ethnological exhibit we just saw. And a clean hit—directly into the vital spot, between the ribs and without the slightest deflection. Extr'ordin'ry! . . . I say, Markham; such marksmanship isn't human. A chance shot might have done it; but the slayer of this johnny wasn't leaving anything to chance. That powerful hunting arrow, which was obviously wrenched from the panel inside, shows premeditation and design——" Suddenly he bent over the body. "Ah! Very interestin'. The nock of the arrow is broken down,—I doubt if it would even hold a taut string." He turned to Heath. "Tell me, Sergeant: where did Professor Dillard find the bow?—not far from that club-room window, what?"

Heath gave a start.

"Right outside the window, in fact, Mr. Vance. It's in on the piano now, waiting for the finger-print men."

"The professor's sign-manual is all they'll find, I'm afraid." Vance opened his case and selected another cigarette. "And I'm rather inclined to believe that the arrow itself is innocent of prints."

Heath was scrutinizing Vance inquisitively.

"What made you think the bow was found near the window, Mr. Vance?" he asked.

"It seemed the logical place for it, in view of the position of Mr. Robin's body, don't y' know."

"Shot from close range, you mean?"

Vance shook his head.

"No, Sergeant. I was referring to the fact that the deceased's feet are pointing toward the basement door, and that, though his arms are extended, his legs are drawn up. Is that the way you'd say a man would fall who'd been shot through the heart?"

Heath considered the point.

"No-o," he admitted. "He'd likely be more crumpled up; or, if he did fall over back, his legs would be straight out and his arms drawn in."

"Quite.—And regard his hat. If he had fallen backwards it would be behind him, not at his feet."

"See here, Vance," Markham demanded sharply; "what's in your mind?"

"Oh, numberless things. But they all boil down to the wholly irrational notion that this defunct gentleman wasn't shot with a bow and arrow at all."

"Then why, in God's name——"

"Exactly! Why the utter insanity of the elaborate stage-setting?—My word, Markham! This business is ghastly."

As Vance spoke the basement door opened, and Doctor Doremus, shepherded by Detective Burke,

stepped jauntily into the areaway. He greeted us breezily and shook hands all round. Then he fixed a fretful eye on Heath.

"By Gad, Sergeant!" he complained, pulling his hat down to an even more rakish angle. "I only spend three hours out of the twenty-four eating my meals; and you invariably choose those three hours to worry me with your confounded bodies. You're ruining my digestion." He looked about him petulantly and, on seeing Robin, whistled softly. "For Gad's sake! A nice fancy murder you picked out for me this time!"

He knelt down and began running his practised fingers over the body.

Markham stood for a moment looking on, but presently he turned to Heath.

"While the doctor's busy with his examination, Sergeant, I'll go up-stairs and have a chat with Professor Dillard." Then he addressed himself to Doremus. "Let me see you before you go, doctor."

"Oh, sure." Doremus did not so much as look up. He had turned the body on one side, and was feeling the base of the skull.

CHAPTER III

A PROPHECY RECALLED

(Saturday, April 2; 1.30 p. m.)

When we reached the main hall Captain Dubois and Detective Bellamy, the finger-print experts from Headquarters, were just arriving. Detective Snitkin, who had evidently been watching for them, led them at once toward the basement stairs, and Markham, Vance and I went up to the second floor.

The library was a large, luxurious room at least twenty feet deep, occupying the entire width of the building. Two sides of it were lined to the ceiling with great embayed bookcases; and in the centre of the west wall rose a massive bronze Empire fireplace. By the door stood an elaborate Jacobean side-board, and opposite, near the windows which faced on 75th Street, was an enormous carved table-desk, strewn with papers and pamphlets. There were many interesting *objets-d'art* in the room; and two diagrammatic Dürers looked down on us from the tapestried panels beside the mantel. All the chairs were spacious and covered with dark leather.

Professor Dillard sat before the desk, one foot resting on a small tufted ottoman; and in a corner near the windows, huddled in a sprawling armchair, was his niece, a vigorous, severely tailored girl with strong, chiselled features of classic cast. The old

professor did not rise to greet us, and made no apology for the omission. He appeared to take it for granted that we were aware of his disability. The introductions were perfunctory, though Markham gave a brief explanation of Vance's and my presence there.

"I regret, Markham," the professor said, when we had settled ourselves, "that a tragedy should be the reason for this meeting; but it's always good to see you.—I suppose you will want to cross-examine Belle and me. Well, ask anything you care to."

Professor Bertrand Dillard was a man in his sixties, slightly stooped from a sedentary studious life: clean-shaven, and with a marked brachycephalic head surmounted with thick white hair combed pompadour. His eyes, though small, were remarkably intense and penetrating; and the wrinkles about his mouth held that grim pursed expression which often comes with years of concentration on difficult problems. His features were those of the dreamer and scientist; and, as the world knows, this man's wild dreams of space and time and motion had been actualized into a new foundation of scientific fact. Even now his face reflected an introspective abstraction, as if the death of Robin were but an intrusion upon the inner drama of his thoughts.

Markham hesitated a moment before answering Then he said with marked deference:

"Suppose, sir, you tell me just what you know of the tragedy. Then I'll put whatever questions I deem essential."

Professor Dillard reached for an old meerschaum pipe on the stand beside him. When he had filled and

lighted it he shifted himself more comfortably in his chair.

"I told you practically everything I know over the telephone. Robin and Sperling called this morning about ten o'clock to see Belle. But she had gone to the courts to play tennis, so they waited in the drawing-room down-stairs. I heard them talking there together for half an hour or so before they went to the basement club-room. I remained here reading for perhaps an hour, and then, as the sunshine looked so pleasant, I decided to step out on the balcony at the rear of the house. I had been there about five minutes, I should say, when I chanced to look down on the archery range; and to my horrified amazement I saw Robin lying on his back with an arrow-shaft protruding from his breast. I hastened down as quickly as my gout would permit, but I could see at once that the poor fellow was dead; so I immediately telephoned to you. There was no one in the house at the time but old Pyne—the butler—and myself. The cook had gone marketing; Arnesson had left for the university at nine o'clock; and Belle was still out playing tennis. I sent Pyne to look for Sperling, but he was nowhere about; and I came back to the library here to wait for you. Belle returned shortly before your men arrived, and the cook came in a little later. Arnesson won't be back until after two."

"There was no one else here this morning—no strangers or visitors?"

The professor shook his head.

"Only Drukker,—I believe you met him here once. He lives in the house at our rear. He often drops in

—mostly, however, to see Arnesson: they have much in common. He's written a book on 'World Lines in Multidimensional Continua.' The man's quite a genius in his way; has the true scientific mind. . . . But when he found that Arnesson was out he sat for a while with me discussing the Brazilian expedition of the Royal Astronomical Society. Then he went home."

"What time was this?"

"About half past nine. Drukker had already gone when Robin and Sperling called."

"Was it unusual, Professor Dillard," asked Vance, "for Mr. Arnesson to be away on Saturday mornings?"

The old professor looked up sharply, and there was a brief hesitation before he answered.

"Not unusual exactly; although he's generally here on Saturdays. But this morning he had some important research work to do for me in the faculty library. . . . Arnesson," he added, "is working with me on my next book."*

There was a short silence; then Markham spoke.

"You said this morning that both Robin and Sperling were suitors for Miss Dillard's hand. . . ."

"Uncle!" The girl sat upright in her chair and turned angry, reproachful eyes upon the old professor. "That wasn't fair."

"But it was true, my dear." His voice was noticeably tender.

* The book referred to by Professor Dillard was the great work which appeared two years later, "The Atomic Structure of Radiant Energy," a mathematical emendation of Planck's quantum theory refuting the classical axiom of the continuity of all physical processes, as contained in Maximus Tyrius' Οὐδὲ ἐνταῦθα ἡ φύσις μεταπηδᾷ ἀθρόως.

"It was true—in a way," she admitted. "But there was no need of mentioning it. You know, as well as they did, how I regarded them. We were good friends—that was all. Only last night, when they were here together, I told them—quite plainly—that I wouldn't listen to any more silly talk of marriage from either of them. They were only boys . . . and now one of them's gone. . . . Poor Cock Robin!" She strove bravely to stifle her emotion.

Vance raised his eyebrows and leaned forward.

"'Cock Robin'?"

"Oh, we all called him that. We did it to tease him, because he didn't like the nickname."

"The sobriquet was inevitable," Vance observed sympathetically. "And it was rather a nice nickname, don't y' know. The original Cock Robin was loved by 'all the birds of the air,' and they all mourned his passing." He watched the girl closely as he spoke.

"I know," she nodded. "I told him that once.—And every one liked Joseph, too. You couldn't help liking him. He was so—so goodhearted and kind."

Vance again settled back in his chair; and Markham continued his questioning.

"You mentioned, professor, that you heard Robin and Sperling talking in the drawing-room. Could you hear any of their conversation?"

The old man shot a sidelong glance at his niece.

"Does that question really matter, Markham?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"It may have some very vital bearing on the situation."

"Perhaps." The professor drew on his pipe

thoughtfully. "On the other hand, if I answer it I may give an erroneous impression, and do a grave injustice to the living."

"Can you not trust me to judge that point?" Markham's voice had become at once grave and urgent.

There was another short silence, broken by the girl.

"Why don't you tell Mr. Markham what you heard, uncle? What harm can it do?"

"I was thinking of you, Belle," the professor answered softly. "But perhaps you are right." He looked up reluctantly. "The fact is, Markham, Robin and Sperling were having some angry words over Belle. I heard only a little, but I gathered that each regarded the other as being guilty of playing unfair—of standing in each other's way. . . ."

"Oh! They didn't mean it," Miss Dillard interpolated vehemently. "They were always ragging each other. There *was* a little jealousy between them; but I wasn't the real cause of it. It was their archery records. You see, Raymond—Mr. Sperling—used to be the better shot; but this last year Joseph beat him at several meets, and at our last annual tournament he became the club's Champion Archer."

"And Sperling thought, perhaps," added Markham, "that he had correspondingly fallen in your estimation."

"That's absurd!" the girl retorted hotly.

"I think, my dear, we can leave the matter safely in Mr. Markham's hands," Professor Dillard said mollifyingly. Then to Markham: "Were there any other questions you cared to ask?"

"I'd like to know anything you can tell me about Robin and Sperling—who they are; their associations; and how long you have known them."

"I think that Belle can enlighten you better than I. Both boys belonged to her set. I saw them only occasionally."

Markham turned inquiringly to the girl.

"I've known both of them for years," she said promptly. "Joseph was eight or ten years older than Raymond, and lived in England up to five years ago, when his father and mother both died. He came to America, and took bachelor quarters on the Drive. He had considerable money, and lived idly, devoting himself to fishing and hunting and other outdoor sports. He went about in society a little, and was a nice, comfortable friend who'd always fill in at a dinner or make a fourth hand at bridge. There was nothing really much to him—in an intellectual way, you understand. . . ."

She paused, as if her remarks were in some way disloyal to the dead, and Markham, sensing her feelings, asked simply:

"And Sperling?"

"He's the son of a wealthy manufacturer of something or other—retired now. They live in Scarsdale in a beautiful country home,—our archery club has its regular ranges there,—and Raymond is a consulting engineer for some firm down-town; though I imagine he works merely to placate his father, for he only goes to the office two or three days a week. He's a graduate of Boston Tech, and I met him when he was a sophomore, home on vacation. Raymond will never set the world afire, Mr. Mark-

ham; but he's really an awfully fine type of American young man—sincere, jolly, a little bashful, and perfectly straight."

It was easy to picture both Robin and Sperling from the girl's brief descriptions; and it was correspondingly difficult to connect either of them with the sinister tragedy that had brought us to the house.

Markham sat frowning for a while. Finally he lifted his head and looked straight at the girl.

"Tell me, Miss Dillard: have you any theory or explanation that might, in any way, account for the death of Mr. Robin?"

"No!" The word fairly burst from her. "Who could want to kill Cock Robin? He hadn't an enemy in the world. The whole thing is incredible. I couldn't believe it had happened until I went and—and saw for myself. Even then it didn't seem real."

"Still, my dear child," put in Professor Dillard, "the man was killed; so there must have been something in his life that you didn't know or suspect. We're constantly finding new stars that the old-time astronomers didn't believe existed."

"I can't believe Joseph had an enemy," she retorted. "I won't believe it. It's too utterly absurd."

"You think then," asked Markham, "that it's unlikely Sperling was in any way responsible for Robin's death?"

"Unlikely?" The girl's eyes flashed. "It's impossible!"

"And yet, y' know, Miss Dillard,"—it was Vance who now spoke in his lazy casual tone—"*Sperling* means 'sparrow'."

The girl sat immobile.. Her face had gone deathly pale, and her hands tightened over the arms of the chair. Then slowly, and as if with great difficulty, she nodded, and her breast began to rise and fall with her labored breathing. Suddenly she shuddered and pressed her handkerchief to her face.

"I'm afraid!" she whispered.

Vance rose and, going to her, touched her comfortingly on the shoulder.

"Why are you afraid?"

She looked up and met his eyes. They seemed to reassure her, for she forced a pitiful smile.

"Only the other day," she said, in a strained voice, "we were all on the archery range down-stairs; and Raymond was just preparing to shoot a single American Round, when Joseph opened the basement door and stepped out on the range. There really wasn't any danger, but Sigurd—Mr. Arnesson, you know—was sitting on the little rear balcony watching us; and when I cried 'He! He!' jokingly to Joseph, Sigurd leaned over and said: 'You don't know what a chance you're running, young man. You're a Cock Robin, and that archer's a sparrow; and you remember what happened to your namesake when a Mr. Sparrow wielded the bow and arrow' —or something like that. No one paid much attention to it at the time. But now! . . ." Her voice trailed off into an awed murmur.

"Come, Belle; don't be morbid." Professor Dillard spoke consolingly, but not without impatience. "It was merely one of Sigurd's ill-timed witticisms. You know he's continually sneering and jesting at realities: it's about the only outlet he has from his constant application to abstractions."

"I suppose so," the girl answered. "Of course, it was only a joke. But now it seems like some terrible prophecy.—Only," she hastened to add, "Raymond *couldn't* have done it."

As she spoke the library door opened suddenly, and a tall gaunt figure appeared on the threshold.

"Sigurd!" Belle Dillard's startled exclamation held an undeniable note of relief.

Sigurd Arnesson, Professor Dillard's protégé and adopted son, was a man of striking appearance—over six feet tall, wiry and erect, with a head which, at first view, appeared too large for his body. His almost yellow hair was unkempt, like a schoolboy's; his nose was aquiline; and his jowls were lean and muscular. Though he could not have been over forty, there was a net-work of lines in his face. His expression was sardonically puckish; but the intense intellectual passion that lighted his blue-gray eyes belied any superficiality of nature. My initial reaction to his personality was one of liking and respect. There were depths in the man—powerful potentialities and high capabilities.

As he entered the room that afternoon, his searching eyes took us all in with a swift, inquisitive glance. He nodded jerkily to Miss Dillard, and then fixed the old professor with a look of dry amusement.

"What, pray, has happened in this three-dimensional house? Wagons and populace without: a guardian at the portals . . . and when I finally overcame the Cerberus and was admitted by Pyne, two plainclothes men hustled me up here without ceremony or explanation. Very amusing, but disconcerting. . . . Ah! I seem to recognize the District

Attorney. Good morning—or rather, afternoon—, Mr. Markham."

Before Markham could return this belated greeting Belle Dillard spoke.

"Sigurd, please be serious.—Mr. Robin has been killed."

" 'Cock Robin,' you mean. Well, well! With such a name what could the beggar expect?" He appeared wholly unmoved by the news. "Who, or what, returned him to the elements?"

"As to who it was, we don't know." It was Markham who answered, in a tone of reproach for the other's levity. "But Mr. Robin was killed with an arrow through the heart."

"Most fitting." Arnesson sat down on the arm of a chair and extended his long legs. "What could be more appropriate than that Cock Robin should die from an arrow shot from the bow of——"

"Sigurd!" Belle Dillard cut him short. "Haven't you joked enough about that? You *know* that Raymond didn't do it."

"Of course, sis." The man looked at her somewhat wistfully. "I was thinking of Mr. Robin's ornithological progenitor." He turned slowly to Markham. "So it's a real murder mystery, is it—with a corpse, and clews, and all the trappings? May I be entrusted with the tale?"

Markham gave him a brief outline of the situation, to which he listened with rapt interest. When the account was ended he asked:

"Was there no bow found on the range?"

"Ah!" Vance, for the first time since the man's arrival, roused himself from seeming lethargy, and

answered for Markham. "A most pertinent question, Mr. Arnesson.—Yes, a bow was found just outside of the basement window, barely ten feet from the body."

"That of course simplifies matters," said Arnesson, with a note of disappointment. "It's only a question now of taking the finger-prints."

"Unfortunately the bow has been handled," explained Markham. "Professor Dillard picked it up and brought it into the house."

Arnesson turned to the older man curiously.

"What impulse, sir, directed you to do that?"

"Impulse? My dear Sigurd, I didn't analyze my emotions. But it struck me that the bow was a vital piece of evidence, and I placed it in the basement as a precautionary measure until the police arrived."

Arnesson made a wry face and cocked one eye humorously.

"That sounds like what our psychoanalytic friends would call a suppression-censor explanation. I wonder what submerged idea was actually in your mind. . . ."

There was a knock at the door, and Burke put his head inside.

"Doc Doremus is waiting for you down-stairs, Chief. He's finished his examination."

Markham rose and excused himself.

"I sha'n't bother you people any more just at present. There's considerable preliminary routine work to be done. But I must ask you to remain upstairs for the time being. I'll see you again before I go."

Doremus was teetering impatiently on his toes when we joined him in the drawing-room.

"Nothing complicated about it," he began, before Markham had a chance to speak. "Our sporty friend was killed by an arrow with a mighty sharp point entering his heart through the fourth intercostal space. Lot of force behind it. Plenty of hemorrhage inside and out. He's been dead about two hours, I should say, making the time of his death around half past eleven. That's only guesswork, however. No signs of a struggle—no marks on his clothes or abrasions on his hands. Death supervened most likely without his knowing what it was all about. He got a nasty bump, though, where his head hit the rough cement when he fell. . . ."

"Now, that's very interestin'." Vance's drawling voice cut in on the Medical Examiner's staccato report. "How serious a 'bump' was it, Doctor?"

Doremus blinked and eyed Vance with some astonishment.

"Bad enough to fracture the skull. I couldn't feel it, of course; but there was a large hæmatoma over the occipital region, dried blood in the nostrils and the ears, and unequal pupils, indicating a fracture of the vault. I'll know more about it after the autopsy." He turned back to the District Attorney. "Anything else?"

"I think not, Doctor. Only let us have your *post-mortem* report as soon as possible."

"You'll have it to-night. The Sergeant's already phoned for the wagon." And shaking hands with all of us, he hurried away.

Heath had stood glowering in the background.

"Well, that don't get us anywheres, sir," he complained, chewing viciously on his cigar.

"Don't be downhearted, Sergeant," Vance chided him. "That blow on the back of the head is worthy of your profoundest consideration. I'm of the opinion it wasn't entirely due to the fall, don't y' know."

The Sergeant was unimpressed by this observation.

"What's more, Mr. Markham," he went on, "there wasn't any finger-prints on either the bow or the arrow. Dubois says they looked as though they'd both been wiped clean. There were a few smears on the end of the bow where the old gentleman picked it up; but not another sign of a print."

Markham smoked a while in gloomy silence.

"What about the handle on the gate leading to the street? And the knob on the door to the alley between the apartment houses?"

"Nothing!" Heath snorted his disgust. "Both of rough, rusty iron that wouldn't take a print."

"I say, Markham," observed Vance; "you're going at this thing the wrong way. Naturally there'd be no finger-prints. Really, y' know, one doesn't carefully produce a playlet and then leave all the stage props in full view of the audience. What we've got to learn is why this particular impresario decided to indulge in silly theatricals."

"It ain't as easy as all that, Mr. Vance," submitted Heath bitterly.

"Did I intimate it was easy? No, Sergeant; it's deucedly difficult. And it's worse than difficult: it's subtle and obscure and . . . fiendish."

CHAPTER IV

A MYSTERIOUS NOTE

(Saturday, April 2; 2 p. m.)

Markham sat down resolutely before the centre-table.

"Suppose, Sergeant, we overhaul the two servants now."

Heath stepped into the hall and gave an order to one of his men. A few moments later a tall, sombre, disjointed man entered and stood at respectful attention.

"This is the butler, sir," explained the Sergeant. "Named Pyne."

Markham studied the man appraisingly. He was perhaps sixty years old. His features were markedly acromegalic; and this distortion extended to his entire figure. His hands were large, and his feet broad and misshapen. His clothes, though neatly pressed, fitted him badly; and his high clerical collar was several sizes too large for him. His eyes, beneath gray, bushy eyebrows, were pale and watery, and his mouth was a mere slit in an unhealthily puffy face. Despite his utter lack of physical prepossession, however, he gave one the impression of shrewd competency.

"So you are the Dillard butler," mused Markham. "How long have you been with the family, Pyne?"

"Going on ten years, sir."

"You came, then, just after Professor Dillard resigned his chair at the university?"

"I believe so, sir." The man's voice was deep and rumbling.

"What do you know of the tragedy that occurred here this morning?" Though Markham put the question suddenly, in the hope, I imagine, of surprising some admission, Pyne received it with the utmost stoicism.

"Nothing whatever, sir. I was unaware that anything had happened until Professor Dillard called to me from the library and asked me to look for Mr. Sperling."

"He told you of the tragedy then?"

"He said: 'Mr. Robin has been murdered, and I wish you'd find Mr. Sperling for me.'—That was all, sir."

"You're sure he said 'murdered,' Pyne?" interjected Vance.

For the first time the butler hesitated, and an added astuteness crept into his look.

"Yes, sir—I'm sure he did. 'Murdered' is what he said."

"And did you see the body of Mr. Robin when you pushed your search?" pursued Vance, his eyes idly tracing a design on the wall.

Again there was a brief hesitation.

"Yes, sir. I opened the basement door to look out on the archery range, and there I saw the poor young gentleman. . . ."

"A great shock it must have given you, Pyne," Vance observed drily. "Did you, by any hap, touch

the poor young gentleman's body?—or the arrow, perhaps?—or the bow?"

Pyne's watery eyes glistened for a moment.

"No—of course not, sir. . . . Why should I, sir?"

"Why, indeed?" Vance sighed wearily. "But you saw the bow?"

The man squinted, as if for purposes of mental visualization.

"I couldn't say, sir. Perhaps, yes; perhaps, no. I don't recall."

Vance seemed to lose all interest in him; and Markham resumed the interrogation.

"I understand, Pyne, that Mr. Drukker called here this morning about half past nine. Did you see him?"

"Yes, sir. He always uses the basement door; and he said good-morning to me as he passed the butler's pantry at the head of the steps."

"He returned the same way he came?"

"I suppose so, sir—though I was up-stairs when he went. He lives in the house at the rear——"

"I know." Markham leaned forward. "I presume it was you who admitted Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling this morning."

"Yes, sir. At about ten o'clock."

"Did you see them again, or overhear any of their remarks while they waited here in the drawing-room?"

"No, sir. I was busy in Mr. Arnesson's quarters most of the morning."

"Ah!" Vance turned his eyes on the man. "That would be on the second floor rear, wouldn't it?—the room with the balcony?"

"Yes, sir."

"Most interestin'. . . . And it was from that balcony that Professor Dillard first saw Mr. Robin's body.—How could he have entered the room without your knowing it? You said, I believe, that your first intimation of the tragedy was when the professor called you from the library and told you to seek Mr. Sperling."

The butler's face turned a pasty white, and I noticed that his fingers twitched nervously.

"I might have stepped out of Mr. Arnesson's room for a moment," he explained, with effort. "Yes—it's quite likely. In fact, sir, I recall going to the linen-closet. . . ."

"Oh, to be sure." Vance lapsed into lethargy.

Markham smoked a while, his gaze concentrated on the table-top.

"Did any one else call at the house this morning, Pyne?" he asked presently.

"No one, sir."

"And you can suggest no explanation for what happened here?"

The man shook his head heavily, his watery eyes in space.

"No, sir. Mr. Robin seemed a pleasant, well-liked young man. He wasn't the kind to inspire murder—if you understand what I mean."

Vance looked up.

"I can't say that I, personally, understand exactly what you mean, Pyne. How do you know it wasn't an accident?"

"I don't, sir," was the unperturbed answer. "But I know a bit about archery—if you'll pardon my

saying so—and I saw right away that Mr. Robin had been killed by a hunting arrow."

"You're very observin', Pyne," nodded Vance. "And quite correct."

It was plain that no direct information was to be got from the butler, and Markham dismissed him abruptly, at the same time ordering Heath to send in the cook.

When she entered I noticed at once a resemblance between father and daughter. She was a slatternly woman of about forty, also tall and angular, with a thin, elongated face and large hands and feet. Hyperpituitarism evidently ran in the Pyne family.

A few preliminary questions brought out the information that she was a widow, named Beedle, and had, at the death of her husband five years before, come to Professor Dillard as the result of Pyne's recommendation.

"What time did you leave the house this morning, Beedle?" Markham asked her.

"Right after half past ten." She seemed uneasy and on the alert, and her voice was defensively belligerent.

"And what time did you return?"

"About half past twelve. That man let me in"—she looked viciously at Heath—"and treated me like I'd been a criminal."

Heath grinned. "The time's O. K., Mr. Markham. She got sore because I wouldn't let her go down-stairs."

Markham nodded non-committally.

"Do you know anything of what took place here this morning?" he went on, studying the woman closely.

"How should I know? I was at Jefferson market."

"Did you see either Mr. Robin or Mr. Sperling?"

"They went down-stairs to the archery-room past the kitchen a little while before I went out."

"Did you overhear anything they said?"

"I don't listen at keyholes."

Markham set his jaw angrily and was about to speak when Vance addressed the woman suavely.

"The District Attorney thought that perhaps the door was open, and that you might have overheard some of their conversation despite your commendable effort not to listen."

"The door might've been open, but I didn't hear anything," she answered sullenly.

"Then you couldn't tell us if there was any one else in the archery-room."

Beedle narrowed her eyes and gave Vance a calculating look.

"Maybe there was some one else," she said slowly. "In fact, I thought I heard Mr. Drukker." A note of venom came into her voice, and the shadow of a hard smile passed over her thin lips. "He was here to call on Mr. Arnesson early this morning."

"Oh, was he, now?" Vance appeared surprised at this news. "You saw him perhaps?"

"I saw him come in, but I didn't see him go out—anyway, I didn't notice. He sneaks in and out at all hours."

"Sneaks, eh? Fancy that! . . . By the by, which door did you use when you went a-marketing?"

"The front door. Since Miss Belle made a club-room out of the basement, I always use the front door."

"Then you didn't enter the archery-room this morning?"

"No."

Vance raised himself in his chair.

"Thanks for your help, Beedle. We won't need you any more now."

When the woman had left us Vance rose and walked to the window.

"We're expending too much zeal in irrelevant channels, Markham," he said. "We'll never get anywhere by ballyragging servants and questioning members of the household. There's a psychological wall to be battered down before we can begin storming the enemy's trenches. Everybody in this ménage has some pet privacy that he's afraid will leak out. Each person so far has told us either less or more than he knows. Disheartenin', but true. Nothing that we've learned dovetails with anything else; and when chronological events don't fit together, you may rest assured that the serrated points of contact have been deliberately distorted. I haven't found one clean joinder in all the tales that have been poured into our ears."

"It's more likely the connections are missing," Markham argued; "and we'll never find them if we don't pursue our questionings."

"You're much too trustin'." Vance walked back to the centre-table. "The more questions we ask the farther afield we'll be taken. Even Professor Dillard didn't give us a wholly honest account. There's something he's keeping back—some suspicion he won't voice. Why did he bring that bow indoors? Arnesson put his finger on a vital spot when he asked

the same question. Shrewd fella, Arnesson.—Then there's our athletic young lady with the muscular calves. She's entangled in various amat'ry meshes, and is endeavoring to extricate herself and her whole coterie without leaving a blemish on any one. A praiseworthy aim, but not one conducive to the unadulterated truth.—Pyne has ideas, too. That flabby facial mask of his curtains many an entrancin' thought. But we'll never probe his cortex by chivyin' him with questions. Somethin' rum, too, about his matutinal labors. He says he was in Arnesson's room all morning; but he obviously didn't know that the professor took a sunnin' on Arnesson's verandah. And that linen-closet alibi—much too specious.—Also, Markham, let your mind flutter about the widowed Beedle's tale. She doesn't like the over-sociable Mr. Drukker; and when she saw a chance to involve him, she did so. She 'thought' she heard his voice in the archery-room. But did she? Who knows? True, he might have tarried among the slings and javelins on his way home and been joined later by Robin and Sperling. . . . Yes, it's a point we must investigate. In fact, a bit of polite converse with Mr. Drukker is strongly indicated. . . ."

Footsteps were heard descending the front stairs, and Arnesson appeared in the archway of the living-room.

"Well, who killed Cock Robin?" he asked, with a satyr-like grin.

Markham rose, annoyed, and was about to protest at the intrusion; but Arnesson held up his hand.

"One moment, please. I'm here to offer my exalted services in the noble cause of justice—mundane

justice, I would have you understand. Philosophically, of course, there's no such thing as justice. If there really were justice we'd all be in for a shingling in the cosmic wood-shed." He sat down facing Markham and chuckled cynically. "The fact is, the sad and precipitate departure of Mr. Robin appeals to my scientific nature. It makes a nice, orderly problem. It has a decidedly mathematical flavor—no undistributed terms, you understand; clear-cut integers with certain unknown quantities to be determined.—Well, I'm the genius to solve it."

"What would be your solution, Arnesson?" Markham knew and respected the man's intelligence, and seemed at once to sense a serious purpose beneath his attitude of sneering flippancy.

"Ah! As yet I haven't tackled the equation." Arnesson drew out an old briar pipe and fingered it affectionately. "But I've always wanted to do a little detective work on a purely earthly plane—the insatiable curiosity and natural inquisitiveness of the physicist, you understand. And I've long had a theory that the science of mathematics can be advantageously applied to the trivialities of our life on this unimportant planet. There's nothing but law in the universe—unless Eddington is right and there's no law at all—and I see no sufficient reason why the identity and position of a criminal can't be determined just as Leverrier calculated the mass and ephemeris of Neptune from the observed deviations in the orbit of Uranus. You remember how, after his computations, he told Galle, the Berlin astronomer, to look for the planet in a specified longitude of the ecliptic."

Arnesson paused and filled his pipe.

"Now, Mr. Markham," he went on; and I tried to decide whether or not the man was in earnest, "I'd like the opportunity of applying to this absurd muddle the purely rational means used by Leverrier in discovering Neptune. But I've got to have the data on the perturbations of Uranus's orbit, so to speak —that is, I must know all the varying factors in the equation. The favor I've come here to ask is that you take me into your confidence and tell me all the facts. A sort of intellectual partnership. I'll figure out this problem for you along scientific lines. It'll be bully sport; and incidentally I'd like to prove my theory that mathematics is the basis of all truth however far removed from scholastic abstractions." He at last got his pipe going, and sank back in his chair. "Is it a bargain?"

"I'll be glad to tell you whatever we know, Arnesson," Markham replied after a brief pause. "But I can't promise to reveal everything that may arise from now on. It might work against the ends of justice and embarrass our investigation."

Vance had sat with half-closed eyes, apparently bored by Arnesson's astonishing request; but now he turned to Markham with a considerable show of animation.

"I say, y' know; there's really no reason why we shouldn't give Mr. Arnesson a chance to translate this crime into the realm of applied mathematics. I'm sure he'd be discreet and use our information only for scientific purposes. And—one never knows, does one?—we may need his highly trained assistance before we're through with this fascinatin' affair."

Markham knew Vance well enough to realize that his suggestion had not been made thoughtlessly; and I was in no wise astonished when he faced Arnesson and said:

"Very well, then. We'll give you whatever data you need to work out your mathematical formula. Anything special you want to know now?"

"Oh, no. I know the details thus far as well as you; and I'll strip Beedle and old Pyne of their contributions when you're gone. But if I solve this problem and determine the exact position of the criminal, don't pigeon-hole my findings as Sir George Airy did those of poor Adams when he submitted his Neptunean calculations prior to Leverrier's. . . ."

At this moment the front door opened, and the uniformed officer stationed on the porch came in, followed by a stranger.

"This gent here says he wants to see the professor," he announced with radiating suspicion; and turning to the man he indicated Markham with a gesture of the head. "That's the District Attorney. Tell him your troubles."

The newcomer seemed somewhat embarrassed. He was a slender, well-groomed man with an unmistakable air of refinement. His age, I should say, was fifty, though his face held a perennially youthful look. His hair was thin and graying, his nose a trifle sharp, and his chin small but in no way weak. His eyes, surmounted by a high broad forehead, were his most striking characteristic. They were the eyes of a disappointed and disillusioned dreamer—half sad, half resentful, as if life had tricked him and left him unhappy and bitter.

He was about to address Markham when he caught sight of Arnesson.

"Oh, good-morning, Arnesson," he said, in a quiet, well-modulated voice. "I hope there's nothing seriously wrong."

"A mere death, Pardee," the other replied carelessly. "The proverbial tempest in a teapot."

Markham was annoyed at the interruption.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asked.

"I trust I am not intruding," the man apologized. "I am a friend of the family,—I live just across the street; and I perceived that something unusual had happened here. It occurred to me I might be of some service."

Arnesson chuckled. "My dear Pardee! Why clothe your natural curiosity in the habiliments of rhetoric?"

Pardee blushed.

"I assure you, Arnesson——" he began; but Vance interrupted him.

"You say you live opposite, Mr. Pardee. You have perhaps been observing this house during the forenoon?"

"Hardly that, sir. My study, however, overlooks 75th Street, and it's true I was sitting at the window most of the morning. But I was busy writing. When I returned to my work from lunch I noticed the crowd and the police cars and also the officer in uniform at the door."

Vance had been studying him from the corner of his eye.

"Did you happen to see any one enter or leave this house this morning, Mr. Pardee?" he asked.

The man shook his head slowly.

"No one in particular. I noticed two young men —friends of Miss Dillard—call at about ten o'clock; and I saw Beedle go out with her market basket. But that's all I recall."

"Did you see either of these young men depart?"

"I don't remember." Pardee knit his brows. "And yet it seems to me one of them left by the range gate. But it's only an impression."

"What time would that have been?"

"Really, I couldn't say. Perhaps an hour or so after his arrival. I wouldn't care to be more specific."

"You recall no other person whatever either coming or going from the house this morning?"

"I saw Miss Dillard return from the tennis courts about half past twelve, just as I was called to lunch. In fact, she waved her racket to me."

"And no one else?"

"I'm afraid not." There was unmistakable regret in his quiet response.

"One of the young men you saw enter here has been killed," Vance told him.

"Mr. Robin—*alias* Cock Robin," supplemented Arnesson, with a comic grimace which affected me unpleasantly.

"Good Heavens! How unfortunate!" Pardee appeared genuinely shocked. "Robin? Wasn't he the Champion Archer of Belle's club?"

"His one claim to immortality.—That's the chap."

"Poor Belle!" Something in the man's manner caused Vance to regard him sharply. "I hope she's not too greatly upset by the tragedy."

"She's dramatizing it, naturally," Arnesson returned. "So are the police, for that matter. Awful pother about nothing in particular. The earth is covered with 'small crawling masses of impure carbohydrates' like Robin—referred to in the aggregate as humanity."

Pardee smiled with tolerant sadness,—he was obviously familiar with Arnesson's cynicisms. Then he appealed to Markham.

"May I be permitted to see Miss Dillard and her uncle?"

"Oh, by all means." It was Vance who answered before Markham could reach a decision. "You'll find them in the library, Mr. Pardee."

The man left the room with a polite murmur of thanks.

"Queer fellow," commented Arnesson, when Pardee was out of hearing. "Cursed with money. Leads an indolent life. His one passion is solving chess problems. . . ."

"Chess?" Vance looked up with interest. "Is he, by any chance, John Pardee, the inventor of the famous Pardee gambit?"

"The same." Arnesson's face crinkled humorously. "Spent twenty years developing a cast-iron offensive that was to add new decimal points to the game. Wrote a book about it. Then went forth proselytizing like a crusader before the gates of Damascus. He's always been a great patron of chess, contributing to tournaments, and scurrying round the world to attend the various chess jousting-bouts. Consequently was able to get his gambit tested. It made a great stir among the infra-champions of the

Manhattan Chess Club. Then poor Pardee organized a series of Masters Tournaments. Paid all the expenses himself. Cost him a fortune, by the way. And of course he stipulated that the Pardee gambit be played exclusively. Well, well, it was very sad. When men like Doctor Lasker and Capablanca and Rubinstein and Finn got to combating it, it went to pieces. Almost every player who used it lost. It was disqualified—even worse than the ill-fated Rice gambit. Terrible blow for Pardee. It put snow in his hair, and took all the rubber out of his muscles. Aged him, in short. He's a broken man."

"I know the history of the gambit," murmured Vance, his eyes resting pensively on the ceiling. "I've used it myself. Edward Lasker* taught it to me. ... ."

The uniformed officer again appeared in the archway and beckoned to Heath. The Sergeant rose with alacrity—the ramifications of chess obviously bored him—and went into the hall. A moment later he returned bearing a small sheet of paper.

"Here's a funny one, sir," he said, handing it to Markham. "The officer outside happened to see it sticking outa the mail-box just now, and thought he'd take a peep at it.—What do you make of it, sir?"

Markham studied it with puzzled amazement, and then without a word handed it to Vance. I rose and looked over his shoulder. The paper was of the conventional typewriter size, and had been folded to fit into the mail-box. It contained several lines of typ-

* The American chess master—sometimes confused with Doctor Emanuel Lasker, the former world champion

ing done on a machine with élite characters and a faded blue ribbon.

The first line read:

Joseph Cochrane Robin is dead.

The second line asked:

Who Killed Cock Robin?

Underneath was typed:

Sperling means sparrow.

And in the lower right-hand corner—the place of the signature—were the two words, in capitals:

THE BISHOP.

CHAPTER V

A WOMAN'S SCREAM

(Saturday, April 2; 2.30 p. m.)

Vance, after glancing at the strange message with its even stranger signature, reached for his monocle with that slow deliberation which I knew indicated a keen suppressed interest. Having adjusted the glass he studied the paper intently. Then he handed it to Arnesson.

"Here's a valuable factor for your equation." His eyes were fixed banteringly on the man.

Arnesson regarded the note superciliously, and with a wry grimace laid it on the table.

"I trust the clergy are not involved in this problem. They're notoriously unscientific. One can't attack them with mathematics. 'The Bishop'. . . ," he mused. "I'm unacquainted with any gentlemen of the cloth.—I think I'll rule out this abracadabra when making my calculations."

"If you do, Mr. Arnesson," replied Vance seriously, "your equation, I fear, will fall to pieces. That cryptic epistle strikes me as rather significant. Indeed—if you will pardon a mere lay opinion—I believe it is the most mathematical thing that has appeared thus far in the case. It relieves the situation of all haphazardness or accident. It's the g, so to speak—the gravitational constant which will govern all our equations."

Heath had stood looking down on the typewritten paper with solemn disgust.

"Some crank wrote this, Mr. Vance," he declared.

"Undoubtedly a crank, Sergeant," agreed Vance. "But don't overlook the fact that this particular crank must have known many interestin' and intimate details—to wit, that Mr. Robin's middle name was Cochrane; that the gentleman had been killed with a bow and arrow; and that Mr. Sperling was in the vicinity at the time of the Robin's passing. Moreover, this well-informed crank must have had what amounted to foreknowledge regarding the murder; for the note was obviously typed and inserted in the letter-box before you and your men arrived on the scene."

"Unless," countered Heath doggedly, "he's one of those bimboes out in the street, who got wise to what had happened and then stuck this paper in the box when the officer's back was turned."

"Having first run home and carefully typewritten his communication—eh, what?" Vance shook his head with a rueful smile. "No, Sergeant, I'm afraid your theory won't do."

"Then what in hell does it mean?" Heath demanded truculently.

"I haven't the foggiest idea." Vance yawned and rose. "Come, Markham, let's while away a few brief moments with this Mr. Drukker whom Beedle abhors."

"Drukker!" exclaimed Arnesson, with considerable surprise. "Where does he fit in?"

"Mr. Drukker," explained Markham, "called here this morning to see you; and it's barely possible he

met Robin and Sperling before he returned home." He hesitated. "Would you care to accompany us?"

"No, thanks." Arnesson knocked out his pipe and got up. "I've a pile of class papers to look over.—It might be as well, however, to take Belle along. Lady Mae's a bit peculiar. . . ."

"Lady Mae?"

"My mistake. Forgot you didn't know her. We all call her Lady Mae. Courtesy title. Pleases the poor old soul. I'm referring to Drukker's mother. Odd character." He tapped his forehead significantly. "Bit touched. Oh, perfectly harmless. Bright as a whistle, but monominded, as it were. Thinks the sun rises and sets in Drukker. Mothers him as if he were an infant. Sad situation. . . . Yes, you'd better take Belle along. Lady Mae likes Belle."

"A good suggestion, Mr. Arnesson," said Vance. "Will you ask Miss Dillard if she'll be good enough to accompany us?"

"Oh, certainly." Arnesson gave us an inclusive smile of farewell—a smile which seemed at once patronizing and satirical—and went up-stairs. A few moments later Miss Dillard joined us.

"Sigurd tells me you want to see Adolph. He, of course, won't mind; but poor Lady Mae gets so upset over even the littlest things. . . ."

"We sha'n't upset her, I hope." Vance spoke reassuringly. "But Mr. Drukker was here this morning, d' ye see; and the cook says she thought she heard him speaking to Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling in the archery-room. He may be able to help us."

"I'm sure he will if he can," the girl answered with

emphasis. "But be very careful with Lady Mae, won't you?"

There was a pleading, protective note in her voice, and Vance regarded her curiously.

"Tell us something of Mrs. Drukker—or Lady Mae—before we visit her. Why should we be so careful?"

"She's had such a tragic life," the girl explained. "She was once a great singer—oh, not just a second-rate artist, but a prima donna with a marvelous career before her.* She married a leading critic of Vienna—Otto Drucker†—and four years later Adolph was born. Then one day in the Wiener Prater, when the baby was two years old, she let him fall; and from that moment on her entire life was changed. Adolph's spine was injured, and he became a cripple. Lady Mae was heartbroken. She held herself to blame for his injury, and gave up her career to devote herself to his care. When her husband died a year later she brought Adolph to America, where she had spent some of her girlhood, and bought the house where she now lives. Her whole life has been centred on Adolph, who grew up a hunchback. She has sacrificed everything for him, and cares for him as though he were a baby. . . ." A shadow crossed her face. "Sometimes I think—we

* Mae Brenner will still be remembered by Continental music lovers. Her début was made at the unprecedented age of twenty-three as *Sulamith* in "Die Königin von Saba" at the Imperial Opera House in Vienna; although her greatest success was perhaps her *Desdemona* in "Otello"—the last rôle she sang before her retirement.

† The name was, of course, originally spelled Drucker. The change—possibly some vague attempt at Americanization—was made by Mrs. Drukker when she settled in this country.

all think—that she still imagines he's only a child. She has become—well, morbid about it. But it's the sweet, terrible morbidity of a tremendous motherlove—a sort of insanity of tenderness, uncle calls it. During the past few months she has grown very strange—and peculiar. I've often found her crooning old German lullabies and kindergarten songs, with her arms crossed on her breast, as if—oh, it seems so sacred and so terrible!—as if she were holding a baby. . . . And she has become frightfully jealous of Adolph. She's resentful of all other men. Only last week I took Mr. Sperling to see her—we often drop in to call on her: she seems so lonely and unhappy—and she looked at him almost fiercely, and said: 'Why weren't you a cripple, too?' . . ."

The girl paused and searched our faces.

"Now don't you understand why I asked you to be careful? . . . Lady Mae may think we have come to harm Adolph."

"We sha'n't add unnecessarily to her suffering," Vance assured her sympathetically. Then, as we moved toward the hall, he asked her a question which recalled to my mind his brief intent scrutiny of the Drukker house earlier that afternoon. "Where is Mrs. Drukker's room situated?"

The girl shot him a startled look, but answered promptly:

"On the west side of the house—its bay window overlooks the archery range."

"Ah!" Vance took out his cigarette case, and carefully selected a *Régie*. "Does she sit much at this window?"

"A great deal. Lady Mae always watches us at

archery practice—why I don't know. I'm sure it pains her to see us, for Adolph isn't strong enough to shoot. He's tried it several times, but it tired him so he had to give it up."

"She may watch you practising for the very reason that it does torture her—a kind of self-immolation, y' know. Those situations are very distressing." Vance spoke almost with tenderness—which, to one who did not know his real nature, would have sounded strange. "Perhaps," he added, as we emerged into the archery range through the basement door, "it would be best if we saw Mrs. Drukker first for a moment. It might tend to allay any apprehensions our visit might cause her. Could we reach her room without Mr. Drukker's knowledge?"

"Oh, yes." The girl was pleased at the idea. "We can go in the rear way. Adolph's study, where he does his writing, is at the front of the house."

We found Mrs. Drukker sitting in the great bay window on a sprawling old-fashioned chaise-longue, propped up with pillows. Miss Dillard greeted her filially and, bending over her with tender concern, kissed her forehead.

"Something rather awful has happened at our house this morning, Lady Mae," she said; "and these gentlemen wanted to see you. I offered to bring them over. You don't mind, do you?"

Mrs. Drukker's pale, tragic face had been turned away from the door as we entered, but now she stared at us with fixed horror. She was a tall woman, slender to the point of emaciation; and her hands, which lay slightly flexed on the arms of the chair, were sinewy and wrinkled like the talons of fabulous bird-

women. Her face, too, was thin and deeply seamed; but it was not an unattractive face. The eyes were clear and alive, and the nose was straight and dominant. Though she must have been well past sixty, her hair was luxuriant and brown.

For several minutes she neither moved nor spoke. Then her hands closed slowly, and her lips parted.

"What do you want?" she asked in a low resonant voice.

"Mrs. Drukker,"—it was Vance who answered—"as Miss Dillard has told you, a tragedy occurred next door this morning, and since your window is the only one directly overlooking the archery range, we thought that you might have seen something that would aid us in our investigation."

The woman's vigilance relaxed perceptibly, but it was a moment or two before she spoke.

"And what did take place?"

"A Mr. Robin was killed.—You knew him perhaps?"

"The archer—Belle's Champion Archer? . . . Yes, I knew him. A strong healthy child who could pull a heavy bow and not get tired.—Who killed him?"

"We don't know." Vance, despite his negligent air, was watching her astutely. "But inasmuch as he was killed on the range, within sight of your window, we hoped you might be able to help us."

Mrs. Drukker's eyelids drooped craftily, and she clasped her hands with a kind of deliberate satisfaction.

"You are sure he was killed on the range?"

"We found him on the range," Vance returned non-committally.

"I see. . . . But what can I do to help you?" She lay back relaxed.

"Did you notice any one on the range this morning?" asked Vance.

"No!" The denial was swift and emphatic. "I saw no one. I haven't looked out on the range all day."

Vance met the woman's gaze steadily, and sighed.

"It's most unfortunate," he murmured. "Had you been looking out of the window this morning, it's wholly possible you might have seen the tragedy. . . . Mr. Robin was killed with a bow and arrow, and there seems to have been no motive whatever for the act."

"You know he was killed with a bow and arrow?" she asked, a tinge of color coming into her ashen cheeks.

"That was the Medical Examiner's report. There was an arrow through his heart when we found him."

"Of course. That seems perfectly natural, doesn't it? . . . An arrow through the Robin's heart!" She spoke with vague aloofness, a distant, fascinated look in her eyes.

There was a strained silence, and Vance moved toward the window.

"Do you mind if I look out?"

With difficulty the woman brought herself back from some far train of thought.

"Oh, no. It isn't much of a view, though. I can see the trees of 76th Street toward the north, and a part of the Dillard yard to the south. But that brick wall opposite is very depressing. Before the apartment house was built I had a beautiful view of the river."

Vance looked for a while down into the archery range.

"Yes," he observed; "if only you had been at the window this morning you might have seen what happened. Your view of the range and the basement door of the Dillards' is very clear. . . . Too bad." He glanced at his watch. "Is your son in, Mrs. Drukker?"

"My son! My baby! What do you want with him?" Her voice rose pitifully, and her eyes fastened on Vance with venomous hatred.

"Nothing important," he said pacifying. "Only, he may have seen some one on the range——"

"He saw no one! He couldn't have seen any one, for he wasn't here. He went out early this morning, and hasn't returned."

Vance looked with pity at the woman.

"He was away all morning?—Do you know where he was?"

"I always know where he is," Mrs. Drukker answered proudly. "He tells me everything."

"And he told you where he was going this morning?" persisted Vance gently.

"Certainly. But I forget for the moment. Let me think. . . ." Her long fingers tapped on the arm of the chair, and her eyes shifted uneasily. "I can't recall. But I'll ask him the moment he returns."

Miss Dillard had stood watching the woman with growing perplexity.

"But, Lady Mac, Adolph was at our house this morning. He came to see Sigurd——"

Mrs. Drukker drew herself up.

"Nothing of the kind!" she snapped, eyeing the girl almost viciously. "Adolph had to go—downtown somewhere. He wasn't near your house—I *know* he wasn't." Her eyes flashed, and she turned a defiant glare on Vance.

It was an embarrassing moment; but what followed was even more painful.

The door opened softly, and suddenly Mrs. Drukker's arms went out.

"My little boy—my baby!" she cried. "Come here, dear."

But the man at the door did not come forward. He stood blinking his beady little eyes at us, like a person waking in strange surroundings. Adolph Drukker was scarcely five feet tall. He had the typical congested appearance of the hunchback. His legs were spindling, and the size of his bulging, distorted torso seemed exaggerated by his huge, dome-like head. But there was intellectuality in the man's face—a terrific passionate power which held one's attention. Professor Dillard had called him a mathematical genius; and one could have no doubts as to his erudition.*

"What does all this mean?" he demanded in a high-pitched, tremulous voice, looking toward Miss Dillard. "Are these friends of yours, Belle?"

The girl started to speak, but Vance halted her with a gesture.

"The truth is, Mr. Drukker," he explained sombrely, "there has been a tragedy next door. This is

* He gave me very much the same impression as did General Homer Lee when I visited him at Santa Monica shortly before his death.

Mr. Markham, the District Attorney, and Sergeant Heath of the Police Department; and at our request Miss Dillard brought us here that we might ask your mother whether or not she had noticed anything unusual on the archery range this morning. The tragedy occurred just outside the basement door of the Dillard house."

Drukker thrust his chin forward and squinted.

"A tragedy, eh? What kind of tragedy?"

"A Mr. Robin was killed—with a bow and arrow."

The man's face began to twitch spasmodically.

"Robin killed? *Killed?* . . . What time?"

"Some time between eleven and twelve probably."

"Between eleven and twelve?" Quickly Drukker's gaze shifted to his mother. He seemed to grow excited, and his huge splay fingers worried the hem of his smoking-jacket. "What did you see?" His eyes glinted as he focussed them on the woman.

"What do you mean, son?" The retort was a panic-stricken whisper.

Drukker's face became hard, and the suggestion of a sneer twisted his lips.

"I mean that it was about that time when I heard a scream in this room."

"You didn't! No—no!" She caught her breath, and wagged her head jerkily. "You're mistaken, son. I didn't scream this morning."

"Well, some one did." There was a cold relentlessness in the man's tone. Then, after a pause, he added: "The fact is, I came up-stairs after I heard the scream, and listened at the door here. But you were walking about humming 'Eia Popeia,' so I went back to my work."

Mrs. Drukker pressed a handkerchief to her face, and her eyes closed momentarily.

"You were at your work between eleven and twelve?" Her voice now rang with subdued eagerness. "But I called you several times——"

"I heard you. But I didn't answer. I was too busy."

"So that was it." She turned slowly toward the window. "I thought you were out. Didn't you tell me——?"

"I told you I was going to the Dillards'. But Sigurd wasn't there, and I came back a little before eleven."

"I didn't see you come in." The woman's energy was spent, and she lay back listlessly, her eyes on the brick wall opposite. "And when I called and you didn't answer I naturally thought you were still out."

"I left the Dillards' by the street gate, and took a walk in the park." Drukker's voice was irritable. "Then I let myself in by the front door."

"And you say you heard me scream. . . . But why should I scream, son? I've had no pains in my back this morning."

Drukker frowned, and his little eyes moved swiftly from Vance to Markham.

"I heard some one scream—a woman—in this room," he iterated stubbornly. "About half past eleven." Then he sank into a chair and gazed moodily at the floor.

This perplexing verbal intercourse between mother and son had held us all spellbound. Though Vance had stood before an old eighteenth-century print near

the door, regarding it with apparent absorption, I knew that no word or inflection had escaped him. Now he swung about and, giving Markham a signal not to interfere, approached Mrs. Drukker.

"We're very sorry, madam, that we've had to trouble you. Forgive us, if you can."

He bowed and turned to Miss Dillard.

"Do you care to pilot us back? Or shall we find our own way down?"

"I'll come with you," the girl said; and going to Mrs. Drukker she put her arm about her. "I'm so sorry, Lady Mae."

As we were passing out into the hall Vance, as if on second thought, paused and looked back at Drukker.

"You'd better come with us, sir," he said, in a casual yet urgent tone. "You knew Mr. Robin, and you may be able to suggest something——"

"Don't go with them, son!" cried Mrs. Drukker. She was sitting upright now, her face contorted with anguish and fear. "Don't go! They're the enemy. They want to hurt you. . . ."

Drukker had risen.

"Why shouldn't I go with them?" he retorted petulantly. "I want to find out about this affair. Maybe—as they say—I can help them." And with a gesture of impatience he joined us.

CHAPTER VI

"'I,' SAID THE SPARROW"

(Saturday, April 2; 3 p. m.)

When we were again in the Dillard drawing-room and Miss Dillard had left us to rejoin her uncle in the library, Vance, without preliminaries, proceeded to the business in hand.

"I didn't care to worry your mother, Mr. Drukker, by questioning you in front of her, but inasmuch as you called here this morning shortly before Mr. Robin's death, it is necessary—as a mere routine procedure—that we seek whatever information you can give us."

Drukker had seated himself near the fireplace. He now drew in his head cautiously, but made no answer.

"You came here," continued Vance, "about half past nine, I believe, to call on Mr. Arnesson."

"Yes."

"By way of the archery range and the basement door?"

"I always come that way. Why walk around the block?"

"But Mr. Arnesson was out this morning."

Drukker nodded. "At the university."

"And, finding Mr. Arnesson away, you sat for a while in the library with Professor Dillard, I understand, discussing an astronomical expedition to South America."

"The expedition of the Royal Astronomical Society to Sobral to test the Einsteinian deflection," amplified Drukker.

"How long were you in the library?"

"Less than half an hour."

"And then?"

"I went down to the archery-room, and glanced at one of the magazines. There was a chess problem in it—a *Zugszwang* end-game that came up recently between Shapiro and Marshall—and I sat down and worked it out. . . ."

"Just a moment, Mr. Drukker." A note of suppressed interest came into Vance's voice. "You're interested in chess?"

"To a certain extent. I don't spend much time at it, however. The game is not purely mathematical; and it's insufficiently speculative to appeal to a wholly scientific mind."

"Did you find the Shapiro-Marshall position difficult?"

"Not so difficult as tricky." Drukker was watching Vance shrewdly. "As soon as I discovered that an apparently useless pawn move was the key to the impasse, the solution was simple."

"How long did it take you?"

"Half an hour or so."

"Until about half past ten, shall we say?"

"That would be about right." Drukker settled deeper into his chair, but his covert alertness did not relax.

"Then you must have been in the archery-room when Mr. Robin and Mr. Sperling came there."

The man did not answer at once, and Vance, pre-

tending not to notice his hesitancy, added: "Professor Dillard said they called at the house about ten and, and after waiting a while in the drawing-room here, went down to the basement."

"Where's Sperling now, by the way?" Drukker's eyes darted suspiciously from one to the other of us.

"We expect him here any minute," Vance replied. "Sergeant Heath has sent two of his men to fetch him."

The hunchback's eyebrows lifted. "Ah! So Sperling is being forcibly brought back." He pyramided his spatulate fingers and inspected them musingly. Then he slowly lifted his eyes to Vance. "You asked me if I saw Robin and Sperling in the archery-room. —Yes; they came down-stairs just as I was going."

Vance leaned back and stretched his legs before him.

"Did you get the impression, Mr. Drukker, that they had—as we euphemistically say—been having words?"

The man considered this question for several moments.

"Now that you mention it," he said at length, "I do recall that there seemed to be a coolness between them. I wouldn't, however, care to be too categorical on that point. You see, I left the room almost immediately after they entered."

"You went out the basement door, I think you said, and thence through the wall gate into 75th Street. Is that correct?"

For a moment Drukker seemed loath to answer; but he replied with an effort at unconcern.

"Quite. I thought I'd take a stroll along the river

before going back to work. I went to the Drive, then up the bridle path, and turned into the park at 79th Street."

Heath, with his habitual suspicion of all statements made to the police, put the next question.

"Did you meet any one you knew?"

Drukker turned angrily, but Vance quickly stepped into the breach.

"It really doesn't matter, Sergeant. If it's neces'ry later on to ascertain that point, we can take the matter up again." Then to Drukker: "You returned from your walk a little before eleven, I think you said, and entered your house by the front door."

"That's right."

"You saw nothing, by the by, that was in the least extr'ordin'ry when you were here this morning?"

"I saw nothing except what I've told you."

"And you're quite sure you heard your mother scream at about half past eleven?"

Vance did not move as he asked this question; but a slightly different note had crept into his voice, and it acted on Drukker in a startling manner. He heaved his squat body out of his chair, and stood glaring down on Vance with menacing fury. His tiny round eyes flashed, and his lips worked convulsively. His hands, dangling before him, flexed and unflexed like those of a man in a paroxysm.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded, his voice a shrill falsetto. "I tell you I heard her scream. I don't care a damn whether she admits it or not. Moreover, I heard her walking in her room. *She was in her room,* understand, *and I was in my room,* between eleven and twelve. And you can't prove

anything different. Furthermore, I'm not going to be cross-examined by you or any one else as to what I was doing or where I was. It's none of your damned business—do you hear me? . . ."

So insensate was his wrath that I expected any minute to see him hurl himself on Vance. Heath had risen and stepped forward, sensing the potential danger of the man. Vance, however, did not move. He continued to smoke languidly, and when the other's fury had been spent, he said quietly and without a trace of emotion:

"There's nothing more we have to ask you, Mr. Drukker. And really, y' know, there's no need to work yourself up. It merely occurred to me that your mother's scream might help to establish the exact time of the murder."

"What could her scream have to do with the time of Robin's death? Didn't she tell you she saw nothing?" Drukker appeared exhausted, and leaned heavily against the table.

At this moment Professor Dillard appeared in the archway. Behind him stood Arnesson.

"What seems to be the matter?" the professor asked. "I heard the noise here, and came down." He regarded Drukker coldly. "Hasn't Belle been through enough to-day without your frightening her this way?"

Vance had risen, but before he could speak Arnesson came forward and shook his finger in mock reprimand at Drukker.

"You really should learn control, Adolph. You take life with such abominable seriousness. You've worked in interstellar spatial magnitudes long

enough to have some sense of proportion. Why attach so much importance to this pin-point of life on earth?"

Drukker was breathing stertorously.

"These swine——" he began.

"Oh, my dear Adolph!" Arnesson cut him short. "The entire human race are swine. Why particularize? . . . Come along. I'll see you home." And he took Drukker's arm firmly and led him downstairs.

"We're very sorry we disturbed you, sir," Markham apologized to Professor Dillard. "The man flew off the handle for some unknown reason. These investigations are not the pleasantest things in the world; but we hope to be through before long."

"Well, make it as brief as you can, Markham. And do try to spare Belle as much as possible.—Let me see you before you go."

When Professor Dillard had returned up-stairs, Markham took a turn up and down the room, his brows knit, his hands clasped behind him.

"What do you make of Drukker?" he asked, halting before Vance.

"Decidedly not a pleasant character. Diseased physically and mentally. A congenital liar. But canny—oh, deuced canny. An abnormal brain—you often find it in cripples of his type. Sometimes it runs to real constructive genius, as with Steinmetz; but too often it takes to abstruse speculation along impractical lines, as with Drukker. Still, our little verbal give-and-take has not been without fruit. He's hiding something that he'd like to tell but doesn't dare."

"That's possible, of course," returned Markham doubtfully. "He's touchy on the subject of that hour between eleven and noon. And he was watching you all the time like a cat."

"A weasel," Vance corrected him. "Yes, I was aware of his flatterin' scrutiny."

"Anyway, I can't see that he's helped us very much."

"No," agreed Vance. "We're not exactly forrader. But we're at least getting some luggage aboard. Our excitable mathematical wizard has opened up some very interestin' lines of speculation. And Mrs. Drukker is fairly teemin' with possibilities. If we knew what both of 'em together know we might find the key to this silly business."

Heath had been sullen for the past hour, and had looked on at the proceedings with bored disdain. But now he drew himself up combatively.

"I'm here to tell you, Mr. Markham, that we're wasting our time. What's the good of all these parleys? Sperling's the boy we want, and when my men bring him in and put him through a little sweating, we'll have enough material for an indictment. He was in love with the Dillard girl and was jealous of Robin—not only on account of the girl, but because Robin could shoot those red sticks straighter than he could. He had a scrap with Robin in this here room—the professor heard 'em at it; and he was down-stairs with Robin, according to the evidence, a few minutes before the murder. . . ."

"And," added Vance ironically, "his name means 'sparrow.' *Quod erat demonstrandum.*—No, Sergeant; it's much too easy. It works out like a game

of Canfield with the cards stacked; whereas this thing was planned much too carefully for suspicion to fall directly on the guilty person."

"I can't see any careful planning about it," persisted Heath. "This Sperling gets sore, picks up a bow, grabs an arrow off of the wall, follows Robin outside, shoots him through the heart, and beats it."

Vance sighed.

"You're far too forthright for this wicked world, Sergeant. If only things happened with such naïve dispatch, life would be very simple—and depressin'. But such was not the *modus operandi* of the Robin's murder. First, no archer could shoot at a moving human target and strike just between the ribs over the vital spot of the heart. Secondly, there's that fracture of Robin's skull. He may have acquired it in falling, but it's not likely. Thirdly, his hat was at his feet, where it wouldn't have been if he had fallen naturally. Fourthly, the nock on the arrow is so bruised that I doubt if it would hold a string. Fifthly, Robin was facing the arrow, and during the drawing and aiming of the bow he would have had time to call out and cover himself. Sixthly. . . ."

Vance paused in the act of lighting a cigarette.

"*By Jove*, Sergeant! I've overlooked something. When a man's stabbed in the heart there's sure to be an immediate flow of blood, especially when the end of the weapon is larger than the shaft and there's no adequate plug for the hole. I say! It's quite possible that you'll find some blood spots on the floor of the archery-room—somewhere near the door most likely."

Heath hesitated, but only momentarily. Experi-

ence had long since taught him that Vance's suggestions were not to be treated cavalierly; and with a good-natured grunt he got up and disappeared toward the rear of the house.

"I think, Vance, I begin to see what you mean," observed Markham, with a troubled look. "But, good God! If Robin's apparent death with a bow and arrow was merely an *ex-post-facto* stage-setting, then we're confronted by something almost too diabolical to contemplate."

"It was the work of a maniac," declared Vance, with unwonted sobriety. "Oh, not the conventional maniac who imagines he's Napoleon, but a madman with a brain so colossal that he has carried sanity to a, humanly speaking, *reductio ad absurdum*—to a point, that is, where humor itself becomes a formula in four dimensions."

Markham smoked vigorously, lost in speculation.

"I hope Heath doesn't find anything," he said at length.

"Why—in Heaven's name?" returned Vance. "If there's no material evidence that Robin met his end in the archery-room, it'll only make the problem more difficult legally."

But the material evidence was forthcoming. The Sergeant returned a few minutes later, crestfallen but excited.

"Damn it, Mr. Vance!" he blurted. "You had the dope all right." He made no attempt to keep the admiration out of his look. "There isn't any actual blood on the floor; but there's a dark place on the cement where somebody's scrubbed it with a wet rag to-day some time. It ain't dry yet; and the place is

right near the door, where you said. And what makes it more suspicious is that one of those rugs has been pulled over it.—But that don't let Sperling out altogether," he added pugnaciously. "He mighta shot Robin indoors."

"And then cleaned up the blood, wiped off the bow and arrow, and placed the body and the bow on the range, before making his departure? . . . Why? . . . Archery, to begin with, isn't an indoor sport, Sergeant. And Sperling knows too much about it to attempt murder with a bow and arrow. A hit such as the one that ended Robin's uneventful career would have been a pure fluke. Teucer himself couldn't have achieved it with any degree of certainty—and, according to Homer, Teucer was the champion archer of the Greeks."

As he spoke Pardee passed down the hall on his way out. He had nearly reached the front door when Vance rose suddenly and went to the archway.

"Oh, I say, Mr. Pardee. Just a moment, please."

The man turned with an air of gracious compliance.

"There is one other question we'd like to ask you," said Vance. "You mentioned seeing Mr. Sperling and Beedle leave here this morning by the wall gate. Are you sure you saw no one else use the gate?"

"Quite sure. That is, I don't recall any one else."

"I was thinking particularly of Mr. Drukker."

"Oh, Drukker?" Pardee shook his head with mild emphasis. "No, I would have remembered him. But you realize a dozen people might have entered and left this house without my noticing them."

"Quite—quite," Vance murmured indifferently. "How good a chess player, by the by, is Mr. Drukker?"

Pardee showed a flicker of surprise.

"He's not a player in the practical sense at all," he explained with careful precision. "He's an excellent analyst, however, and understands the theory of the game amazingly well. But he's had little practice at actual over-the-board play."

When Pardee had gone Heath cocked a triumphant eye at Vance.

"I notice, sir," he remarked good-naturedly, "that I'm not the only one who'd like to check the hunchback's alibi."

"Ah, but there's a difference between checking an alibi, and demanding that the person himself prove it."

At this moment the front door was thrown open. There were heavy footsteps in the hall, and three men appeared in the archway. Two were obviously detectives, and between them stood a tall, clean-cut youth of about thirty.

"We got him, Sergeant," announced one of the detectives, with a grin of vicious satisfaction. "He beat it straight home from here, and was packing up when we walked in on him."

Sperling's eyes swept the room with angry apprehension. Heath had planted himself before the man, and stood looking him up and down triumphantly.

"Well, young fella, you thought you'd get away, did you?" The Sergeant's cigar bobbed up and down between his lips as he spoke.

The color mounted to Sperling's cheeks, and he set his mouth stubbornly.

"So! You've got nothing to say?" Heath went on, squaring his jaw ferociously. "You're one of these silent lads, are you? Well, we'll make you talk." He turned to Markham. "How about it, sir? Shall I take him to Headquarters?"

"Perhaps Mr. Sperling will not object to answering a few questions here," said Markham quietly.

Sperling studied the District Attorney a moment; then his gaze moved to Vance, who nodded to him encouragingly.

"Answer questions about what?" he asked, with an obvious effort at self-control. "I was preparing to go away for the week-end when these ruffians forced their way into my room; and I was brought here without a word of explanation or even an opportunity to communicate with my family. Now you talk of taking me to Police Headquarters." He gave Heath a defiant glare. "All right, take me to Police Headquarters—and be damned to you!"

"What time did you leave here this morning, Mr. Sperling?" Vance's tone was soft and ingratiating, and his manner reassuring.

"About a quarter past eleven," the man answered. "In time to catch the 11.40 Scarsdale train from Grand Central."

"And Mr. Robin?"

"I don't know what time Robin went. He said he was going to wait for Belle—Miss Dillard. I left him in the archery-room."

"You saw Mr. Drukker?"

"For a minute—yes. He was in the archery-

room when Robin and I went down-stairs; but he left immediately."

"Through the wall gate? Or did he walk down the range?"

"I don't remember—in fact, I didn't notice. . . . Say, look here: what's all this about anyway?"

"Mr. Robin was killed this morning," said Vance, "—at some time near eleven o'clock."

Sperling's eyes seemed to start from his head.

"Robin killed? My God! . . . Who—who killed him?" The man's lips were dry, and he wetted them with his tongue.

"We don't know yet," Vance answered. "He was shot through the heart with an arrow."

This news left Sperling stunned. His eyes traveled vaguely from side to side, and he fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette.

Heath stepped nearer to him, and thrust out his chin.

"Maybe *you* can tell us who killed him—*with a bow and arrow!*"

"Why—why do you—think I know?" Sperling managed to stammer.

"Well," returned the Sergeant relentlessly, "you were jealous of Robin, weren't you? You had a hot argument with him about the girl, right in this room, didn't you? And you were alone with him just before he was croaked, weren't you? And you're a pretty good shot with the bow and arrow, aren't you? —That's why I think that maybe you know something." He narrowed his eyes and drew his upper lip over his teeth. "Say! Come clean. Nobody else but you coulda done it. You had a fight with him

over the girl, and you were the last person seen with him—*only a few minutes before he was killed.* And who else woulda shot him with a bow and arrow except a champeen archer—huh? . . . Make it easy for yourself, and spill the story. We've got you."

A strange light had gathered in Sperling's eyes, and his body became rigid.

"Tell me,"—he spoke in a strained, unnatural voice—"did you find the bow?"

"Sure we found it." Heath laughed unpleasantly. "Right where you left it—in the alley."

"What kind of a bow was it?" Sperling's gaze had not moved from some distant point.

"What kind of a bow?" repeated Heath. "A regular bow——"

Vance, who had been watching the youth closely, interrupted.

"I think I understand the question, Sergeant.—It was a woman's bow, Mr. Sperling. About five-feet-six, and rather light—under thirty pounds, I should say."

Sperling drew a slow, deep breath, like a man steeling himself for some bitter resolution. Then his lips parted in a faint, grim smile.

"What's the use?" he asked listlessly. "I thought I'd have time to get away. . . . Yes, I killed him."

Heath grunted with satisfaction, and his belligerent manner at once disappeared.

"You got more sense than I thought you had," he said, in an almost paternal tone, nodding in a businesslike manner to the two detectives. "Take him along, boys. Use my buggy—it's outside. And lock

him up without booking him. I'll prefer the charge when I get to the office."

"Come along, bo," ordered one of the detectives, turning toward the hall.

But Sperling did not at once obey. Instead he looked appealingly at Vance.

"Could I—might I——" he began.

Vance shook his head.

"No, Mr. Sperling. It would be best if you didn't see Miss Dillard. No use of harrowin' her feelings just now. . . . Cheerio."

The man turned without another word and went out between his captors.

CHAPTER VII

VANCE REACHES A CONCLUSION

(Saturday, April 2; 3.30 p. m.)

When we were again alone in the drawing-room Vance rose and, stretching himself, went to the window. The scene that had just been enacted, with its startling climax, had left us all somewhat dazed. Our minds were busy, I think, with the same idea; and when Vance spoke it was as if he were voicing our thoughts.

"We're back in the nursery, it seems. . . .

> " 'I,' said the Sparrow,
> 'With my bow and arrow,
> I killed Cock Robin.' . . .

I say, Markham; this is getting a bit thick."

He came slowly back to the centre-table and crushed out his cigarette. From the corner of his eye he looked at Heath.

"Why so pensive, Sergeant? You should be singing roundelays and doing a joyous tarantella. Has not your villain confessed to the dark deed? Does it not fill you with gladness to know that the culprit will soon be languishin' in an oubliette?"

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Vance," Heath admitted sullenly, "I'm not satisfied. That confession came too easy, and—well, I've seen a lot of guys come

across, but this one somehow didn't act like he was guilty. And that's a fact, sir."

"At any rate," submitted Markham hopefully, "his preposterous confession will damp the newspapers' curiosity and give us a free field to push our investigation. This case is going to make an ungodly noise; but as long as the reporters think the guilty person is jailed, they won't be bothering us for news of 'developments.' "

"I'm not saying he ain't guilty," asserted Heath pugnaciously, obviously arguing against his own convictions. "We certainly had the goods on him, and he mighta realized it and spilled the works, thinking it would go easier with him at the trial. Maybe he's not so dumb, after all."

"It won't do, Sergeant," said Vance. "The lad's mental workin's were deucedly simple. He knew Robin was waiting to see Miss Dillard, and he also knew she'd non-suited him, so to speak, last night. Sperling evidently didn't have a high opinion of Robin; and when he heard of the gentleman's death at the hands of some one who wielded a short, light bow, he jumped to the conclusion that Robin had overstepped the bounds of propriety in his wooing, and received a righteous shaft through the heart. There was then nothing for our noble, mid-Victorian sparrow to do but slap his own manly bosom and proclaim: '*Ecce homo!*' . . . It's most distressin'."

"Well, anyhow," grumbled Heath, "I'm not going to turn him loose. If Mr. Markham don't want to prosecute, that's up to him."

Markham looked at the Sergeant tolerantly. He realized the strain the man was under, and it was in

keeping with his bigness of nature that he took no offence at the other's words.

"Perhaps, however, Sergeant," he said kindly, "you'll not object to continuing the investigation with me, even if I don't decide to prosecute Sperling."

Heath was at once contrite. He got up briskly and, going to Markham, held out his hand.

"You know it, sir!"

Markham took the offered hand, and rose with a gracious smile.

"I'll leave things with you, then, for the time being. I've some work to do at the office, and I told Swacker to wait for me."* He moved dispiritedly toward the hall. "I'll explain the situation to Miss Dillard and the professor before I go.—Anything special in mind, Sergeant?"

"Well, sir, I think I'll take a good look for that rag that was used to wipe up the floor down-stairs. And while I'm at it I'll go over the archery-room with a fine-tooth comb. Also, I'll put the screws to the cook and the butler again—especially the cook. She musta been mighty close at hand when the dirty work was going on. . . . Then the regular routine stuff—inquiries in the neighborhood and that sorta thing."

"Let me know the results. I'll be at the Stuyvesant Club later to-day and to-morrow afternoon."

Vance had joined Markham in the archway.

"I say, old man," he remarked, as we went toward the stairs; "don't minimize the importance of that cryptic note left in the mail-box. I've a strong

* Saturday was a "half day" at the District Attorney's office. Swacker was Markham's secretary.

psychic suspicion that it may be the key to the nursery. You'd better ask Professor Dillard and his niece if 'Bishop' has any provocative significance for them. That diocesan signature has a meaning."

"I'm not so sure," returned Markham dubiously. "It appears utterly meaningless to me. But I'll follow your suggestion."

Neither the professor nor Miss Dillard, however, could recall any personal association with the word *Bishop;* and the professor was inclined to agree with Markham that the note was without any significant bearing on the case.

"It strikes me," he said, "as a piece of juvenile melodrama. It isn't likely that the person who killed Robin would adopt a vague pseudonym and write notes about his crime. I'm not acquainted with criminals, but such conduct doesn't impress me as logical."

"But the crime itself was illogical," ventured Vance pleasantly.

"One can't speak of a thing being illogical, sir," returned the professor tartly, "when one is ignorant of the very premises of a syllogism."

"Exactly." Vance's tone was studiously courteous. "Therefore, the note itself may not be without logic."

Markham tactfully changed the subject.

"What I came particularly to tell you, professor, is that Mr. Sperling called a short time ago and, when informed of Mr. Robin's death, confessed to having done it himself. . . ."

"Raymond confessed!" gasped Miss Dillard.

Markham looked at the girl sympathetically.

"To be quite frank, I didn't believe Mr. Sperling. Some mistaken idea of chivalry undoubtedly led him to admit the crime."

"'Chivalry'?" she repeated, leaning forward tensely. "What exactly do you mean by that, Mr. Markham?"

It was Vance who answered.

"The bow that was found on the range was a woman's bow."

"Oh!" The girl covered her face with her hands, and her body shook with sobs.

Professor Dillard regarded her helplessly; and his impotency took the form of irritation.

"What flummery is this, Markham?" he demanded. "Any archer can shoot with a woman's bow. . . . That unutterable young idiot! Why should he make Belle miserable by his preposterous confession! . . . Markham, my friend, do what you can for the boy."

Markham gave his assurances, and we rose to go.

"By the by, Professor Dillard," said Vance, pausing at the door; "I trust you won't misunderstand me, but there's a bare possibility that it was some one with access to this house who indulged in the practical joke of typing that note. Is there, by any chance, a typewriter on the premises?"

It was patent that the professor resented Vance's question, but he answered civilly enough.

"No,—nor has there ever been one to my knowledge. I threw my own machine away ten years ago when I left the university. An agency does whatever typing I need."

"And Mr. Arnesson?"

"He never uses a typewriter."

As we descended the stairs we met Arnesson returning from Drukker's.

"I've placated our local Leipnitz," he announced, with an exaggerated sigh. "Poor old Adolph! The world is too much with him. When he's wallowing in the relativist formulas of Lorentz and Einstein he's serene. But when he's dragged down to actuality he disintegrates."

"It may interest you to know," said Vance casually, "that Sperling has just confessed to the murder."

"Ha!" Arnesson chuckled. "Quite in keeping. 'I,' said the Sparrow. . . . Very neat. Still, I don't know how it'll work out mathematically."

"And, since we agreed to keep you posted," continued Vance, "it may help your calculations to know that we have reason to believe that Robin was killed in the archery-room and placed on the range afterwards."

"Glad to know it." Arnesson became momentarily serious. "Yes, that may affect my problem." He walked with us to the front door. "If there's any way I can be of service to you, call on me."

Vance had paused to light a cigarette, but I knew, by the languid look in his eyes, that he was making a decision. Slowly he turned to Arnesson.

"Do you know if Mr. Drukker or Mr. Pardee has a typewriter?"

Arnesson gave a slight start, and his eyes twinkled shrewdly.

"Aha! That Bishop note. . . . I see. Merely a matter of being thorough. Quite right." He nodded with satisfaction. "Yes; both have typewriters.

Drukker types incessantly—thinks to the keyboard, so he says. And Pardee's chess correspondence is as voluminous as a movie hero's. Types it all himself, too."

"Would it be any great trouble to you," asked Vance, "to secure a specimen of the typing of each machine, and also a sample of the paper these two gentlemen use?"

"None whatever." Arnesson appeared delighted with the commission. "Have them for you this afternoon. Where'll you be?"

"Mr. Markham will be at the Stuyvesant Club. You might phone him there, and he can arrange——"

"Why bother to arrange anything? I'll bring my findings to Mr. Markham personally. Only too glad. Fascinating game, being a sleuth."

Vance and I returned home in the District Attorney's car, and Markham continued to the office. At seven o'clock that night the three of us met at the Stuyvesant Club for dinner; and at half past eight we were sitting in Markham's favorite corner of the lounge-room smoking and having our coffee.

During the meal no mention of the case had been made. The late editions of the afternoon papers had carried brief accounts of Robin's death. Heath had evidently succeeded in curbing the reporters' curiosity and clipping the wings of their imagination. The District Attorney's office being closed, the newspaper men were unable to bombard Markham with questions, and so the late press was inadequately supplied with information. The Sergeant had guarded the Dillard house well, for the reporters had not succeeded in reaching any member of the household.

Markham had picked up a late *Sun* on his way from the dining-room, and glanced through it carefully as he sipped his coffee.

"This is the first faint echo," he commented ruefully. "I shudder to think what the morning papers will contain."

"There's nothing to do but bear it," smiled Vance unfeelingly. "The moment some bright journalistic lad awakes to the robin-sparrow-arrow combination the city editors will go mad with joy, and every front page in the country will look like a Mother-Goose hoarding."

Markham lapsed into despondency. Finally he struck the arm of his chair angrily with his fist.

"Damn it, Vance! I won't let you inflame my imagination with this idiocy about nursery rhymes." Then he added, with the ferocity of uncertainty: "It's a sheer coincidence, I tell you. There simply couldn't be anything in it."

Vance sighed. "Convince yourself against your will; you're of the same opinion still—to paraphrase Butler." He reached into his pocket and took out a sheet of paper. "Putting all juvenilia to one side *pro tempore*, here's an edifyin' chronology I drew up before dinner. . . . Edifyin'? Well, it might be if we knew how to interpret it."

Markham studied the paper for several minutes. What Vance had written down was this:

9.00 a. m. Arnesson left house to go to university library.
9.15 a. m. Belle Dillard left house for the tennis courts.
9.30 a. m. Drukker called at house to see Arnesson.
9.50 a. m. Drukker went down-stairs to archery-room.
10.00 a. m. Robin and Sperling called at house and remained in drawing-room for half an hour.

10.30 a. m. Robin and Sperling went down to archery-room.
10.32 a. m. Drukker says he went out for a walk, by the wall gate.
10.35 a. m. Beedle went marketing.
10.55 a. m. Drukker says he returned to his own house.
11.15 a. m. Sperling went away by wall gate.
11.30 a. m. Drukker says he heard a scream in his mother's room.
11.35 a. m. Professor Dillard went on balcony of Arnesson's room.
11.40 a. m. Professor Dillard saw Robin's body on archery range.
11.45 a. m. Professor Dillard telephoned to District Attorney's office.
12.25 p. m. Belle Dillard returned from tennis.
12.30 p. m. Police arrived at Dillard house.
12.35 p. m. Beedle returned from market.
2.00 p. m. Arnesson returned from university.

Ergo: Robin was killed at some time between 11.15 (when Sperling departed) and 11.40 (when Professor Dillard discovered body).

The only other persons known to have been in the house during this time were Pyne and Professor Dillard.

The disposition of all other persons connected in any way with the murder was as follows (according to statements and evidence now in hand):

1. Arnesson was at the university library between 9 a. m. and 2 p. m.
2. Belle Dillard was at the tennis courts between 9.15 a. m. and 12.25 p. m.
3. Drukker was walking in the park between 10.32 a. m. and 10.55 a. m.; and was in his study from 10.55 a. m. on.
4. Pardee was in his house the entire morning.
5. Mrs. Drukker was in her room the entire morning.
6. Beedle was marketing between 10.35 a. m. and 12.35 p. m.

7. Sperling was on his way to the Grand Central Station between 11.15 a. m. and 11.40 a. m., at which hour he took a train for Scarsdale.

Conclusion: Unless at least one of these seven alibis is shaken, the whole weight of suspicion, and indeed the actual culpability, must rest upon either Pyne or Professor Dillard.

When Markham finished reading the paper, he made a gesture of exasperation.

"Your entire implication is preposterous," he said irritably; "and your conclusion is a *non-sequitur.* The chronology helps set the time of Robin's death, but your assumption that one of the persons we've seen to-day is necessarily guilty is arrant nonsense. You completely ignore the possibility that any outsider could have committed the crime. There were three ways of reaching the range and the archery-room without entering the house—the wall gate on 75th Street, the other wall gate on 76th Street, and the alleyway between the two apartment houses, leading to Riverside Drive."

"Oh, it's highly probable that one of these three entrances was used," returned Vance. "But don't overlook the fact that the most secluded, and therefore the most likely, of these three means of entry—to wit, the alleyway—is guarded by a locked door to which no one would be apt to have a key except some member of the Dillard household. I can't picture a murderer walking into the range from either of the street gates: he would be taking too many chances of being seen."

Vance leaned forward seriously.

"And, Markham, there are other reasons why we

may eliminate strangers or casual prowlers. The person who sent Robin to his Maker must have been privy to the exact state of affairs in the Dillard house this morning between a quarter past eleven and twenty minutes to twelve. He knew that Pyne and the old professor were alone there. He knew that Belle Dillard was not roaming about the premises. He knew that Beedle was away and could neither hear him nor surprise him. He knew that Robin—his victim—was there, and that Sperling had departed. Moreover, he knew something of the lie of the land—the situation of the archery-room, for instance; for it's only too plain that Robin was killed in that room. No one who wasn't familiar with all these details would have dared enter the grounds and staged a spectacular murder. I tell you, Markham, it was some one very close to the Dillard ménage—some one who was able to find out just what conditions obtained in that household this morning."

"What about that scream of Mrs. Drukker's?"

"Ah, what about it, indeed? Mrs. Drukker's window may have been a factor that the murderer overlooked. Or perhaps he knew about it and decided to take that one chance of being seen. On the other hand, we don't know whether the lady screamed or not. She says No; Drukker says Yes. They both have an ulterior motive for what they poured into our trustin' ears. Drukker may have told of the scream by way of proving he was at home between eleven and twelve; and Mrs. Drukker may have denied it for fear he wasn't home. It's very much of an *olla podrida.* But it doesn't matter. The main point I'm trying to make is that only an intimate of the Dillard house could have done this devilish business."

"We have too few facts to warrant that conclusion," asserted Markham. "Chance may have played a part——"

"Oh, I say, old man! Chance may work out to a few permutations, but not to twenty.—And there is that note left in the mail-box. The murderer even knew Robin's middle name."

"Assuming, of course, that the murderer wrote the note."

"Do you prefer to assume that some balmy joker found out about the crime through telepathy or crystal-gazing, hied to a typewriter, composed a dithyramb, returned hot-footed to the house, and, for no good reason, took the terrific risk of being seen putting the paper in the mail-box?"

Before Markham could answer Heath entered the lounge room and hurried to our corner. That he was worried and uneasy was obvious. With scarcely a word of greeting he handed a typewritten envelope to Markham.

"That was received by the *World* in the late afternoon mail. Quinan, the police reporter of the *World*, brought it to me a little while ago; and he says that the *Times* and the *Herald* also got copies of it. The letters were stamped at one o'clock to-day, so they were probably posted between eleven and twelve. What's more, Mr. Markham, they were mailed in the neighborhood of the Dillard house, for they went through Post Office Station 'N' on West 69th Street."

Markham withdrew the enclosure from the envelope. Suddenly his eyes opened wide, and the muscles about his mouth tightened. Without looking up he handed the letter to Vance. It consisted of a

single sheet of typewriting paper, and the words printed on it were identical to those on the note left in the Dillard mail-box. Indeed, the communication was an exact duplicate of the other:—"Joseph Cochrane Robin is dead. Who Killed Cock Robin? Sperling means sparrow.—THE BISHOP."

Vance scarcely glanced at the paper.

"Quite in keeping, don't y' know," he said indifferently. "The Bishop was afraid the public might miss the point of his joke; so he explained it to the press."

"Joke, did you say, Mr. Vance?" asked Heath bitterly. "It ain't the kind of joke I'm used to. This case gets crazier——"

"Exactly, Sergeant. A crazy joke."

A uniformed boy stepped up to the District Attorney and, bending over his shoulder discreetly, whispered something.

"Bring him here right away," ordered Markham. Then to us: "It's Arnesson. He'll probably have those specimens of typing." A shadow had settled on his face; and he glanced again at the note Heath had brought him. "Vance," he said in a low voice, "I'm beginning to believe that this case may turn out to be as terrible as you think. I wonder if the typing will correspond. . . ."

But when the note was compared with the specimens Arnesson brought, no similarity whatever could be discerned. Not only were the typing and the ink different from those of either Pardee's or Drukker's machine, but the paper did not match any one of the samples that Arnesson had secured.

CHAPTER VIII

ACT TWO

(Monday, April 11; 11.30 a. m.)

There is no need to recall here the nation-wide sensation caused by Robin's murder. Every one remembers how that startling tragedy was featured in the country's press. It was referred to by various designations. Some newspapers called it the Cock Robin murder. Others, more alliterative but less accurate,* termed it the Mother Goose murder. But the signature of the typewritten notes appealed strongly to the journalistic sense of mystery; and in time the killing of Robin came to be known as the Bishop murder case. Its strange and fearful combination of horror and nursery jargon inflamed the public's imagination; and the sinister and insane implications of its details affected the entire country like some grotesque nightmare whose atmosphere could not be shaken off.

During the week following the discovery of Robin's body, the detectives of the Homicide Bureau, as well as the detectives connected with the District Attorney's office, were busy night and day pushing their inquiries. The receipt of the duplicate Bishop notes

* The old anonymous nursery rhyme, "The Death and Burial of Cock Robin," is not, as is commonly supposed, one of the original "Mother Goose Melodies," although it has often been included in modern editions of that famous work.

by the leading New York morning papers had dissipated whatever ideas Heath may have held as to Sperling's guilt; and though he refused to put his official imprimatur on the young man's innocence he threw himself, with his usual gusto and pertinacity, into the task of finding another and more plausible culprit. The investigation which he organized and superintended was as complete as had been that of the Greene murder case. No avenue which held the meagrest hope of results was overlooked; and the report he drew up would have given joy even to those meticulous criminologists of the University of Lausanne.

On the afternoon of the day of the murder he and his men had searched for the cloth that had been used to wipe up the blood in the archery-room; but no trace of it was found. Also, a thorough examination of the Dillard basement was made in the hope of finding other clews; but although Heath had put the task in the hands of experts, the result was negative. The only point brought to light was that the fibre rug near the door had recently been moved so as to cover the cleansed spot on the cement floor. This fact, however, merely substantiated the Sergeant's earlier observation.

The *post-mortem* report of Doctor Doremus lent color to the now officially accepted theory that Robin had been killed in the archery-room and then placed on the range. The autopsy showed that the blow on the back of his skull had been a particularly violent one and had been made with a heavy rounded instrument, resulting in a depressed fracture quite different from the fissured fracture caused by striking

a flat surface. A search was instituted for the weapon with which the blow had been dealt; but no likely instrument was turned up.

Though Beedle and Pyne were questioned by Heath several times, nothing new was learned from them. Pyne insisted that he had been up-stairs the entire morning in Arnesson's room, except for a few brief absences to the linen-closet and the front door, and clung tenaciously to his denial that he had touched either the body or the bow when sent by Professor Dillard to find Sperling. The Sergeant, however, was not entirely satisfied with the man's testimony.

"That bleary-eyed old cormorant has got something up his sleeve," he told Markham disgustedly. "But it would take the rubber hose and the water cure to make him spill it."

A canvass of all the houses in 75th Street between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive was made in the hope of finding a tenant who had noticed some one entering or emerging from the Dillard wall gate during the forenoon. But nothing was gained by this tedious campaign. Pardee, it seemed, was the only resident within view of the Dillard house who had observed any one in the neighborhood that morning. In fact, after several days of arduous inquiries along this line the Sergeant realized that he would have to proceed without any outside or fortuitous assistance.

The various alibis of the seven persons whom Vance had tabulated in his notation for Markham, were gone into as thoroughly as circumstances would permit. It was obviously impossible to check them com-

pletely, for, in the main, they were based solely on the statements of the individuals involved. Moreover the investigation had to be made with the utmost care lest suspicion be aroused. The results of these inquiries were as follows:

1. Arnesson had been seen in the university library by various people, including an assistant librarian and two students. But the time covered by their evidence was neither consecutive nor specific as to the hour.

2. Belle Dillard had played several sets of tennis at the public courts at 119th Street and Riverside Drive, but because there had been more than four in her party she had twice relinquished her place to a friend; and none of the players could state positively that she had remained at the courts during these periods.

3. The time that Drukker departed from the archery-room was definitely determined by Sperling; but no one could be found who had seen him thereafter. He admitted he had met no one he knew in the park, but insisted he had stopped for a few minutes to play with some strange children.

4. Pardee had been alone in his study. His old cook and his Japanese valet had been in the rear of the house, and had not seen him until lunch time. His alibi therefore was purely a negative one.

5. Mrs. Drukker's word had to be accepted as to her whereabouts that morning, for no one had seen her between nine-thirty, when Drukker went to call on Arnesson, and one o'clock, when the cook brought up her luncheon.

6. Beedle's alibi was checked with fairly satisfactory completeness. Pardee had seen her leave the house at 10.35; and she was remembered by several of the hucksters at the Jefferson Market between eleven and twelve.

7. The fact that Sperling had taken the 11.40 train to Scarsdale was verified; therefore he would have had to leave the Dillard house at the time he stated—namely: 11.15. The determination of this point, however, was mere-

ly a matter of routine, for he had been practically eliminated from the case. But if, as Heath explained, it had been found that he had not taken the 11.40 train, he would have again become an important possibility.

Pursuing his investigations along more general lines, the Sergeant went into the histories and associations of the various persons involved. The task was not a difficult one. All were well known, and information concerning them was readily accessible; but not one item was unearthed that could be regarded as even remotely throwing any light on Robin's murder. Nothing transpired to give so much as a hint to the motive for the crime; and after a week's intensive inquiry and speculation the case was still cloaked in seemingly impenetrable mystery.

Sperling had not been released. The *prima facie* evidence against him, combined with his absurd confession, made impossible such a step on the part of the authorities. Markham, however, had held an unofficial conference with the attorneys whom Sperling's father had engaged to handle the case, and some sort of a "gentleman's agreement" had, I imagine, been reached; for although the State made no move to apply for an indictment (despite the fact that the Grand Jury was sitting at the time), the defense lawyers did not institute *habeas corpus* proceedings. All the indications pointed to the supposition that both Markham and Sperling's attorneys were waiting for the real culprit to be apprehended.

Markham had had several interviews with the members of the Dillard household, in a persistent effort to bring out some trivial point that might lead to a fruitful line of inquiry; and Pardee had been sum-

moned to the District Attorney's office to make an affidavit as to what he had observed from his window on the morning of the tragedy. Mrs. Drukker had been interrogated again; but not only did she emphatically deny having looked out of her window that morning, but she scoffed at the idea that she had screamed.

Drukker, when re-questioned, modified somewhat his former testimony. He explained that he might have been mistaken as to the source of the scream, and suggested that it could have come from the street or from one of the court windows of the apartment house. In fact, he said, it was highly unlikely that his mother had uttered the scream, for when he went to her door a moment later she was humming an old German nursery song from Humperdinck's "Hänsel und Gretel." Markham, convinced that nothing further was to be learned from either him or Mrs. Drukker, finally concentrated on the Dillard house itself.

Arnesson attended the informal conferences held in Markham's office; but for all his voluble and cynical observations, he appeared to be as much at sea as the rest of us. Vance chaffed him good-naturedly about the mathematical formula that was to solve the case, but Arnesson insisted that a formula could not be worked out until all the factors of the theorem were available. He appeared to regard the entire affair as a kind of Juvenalian lark; and Markham on several occasions gave vent to his exasperation. He reproached Vance for having made Arnesson an unofficial confrère in the investigation, but Vance defended himself on the ground that sooner or later Arnesson would supply some piece of seemingly ir-

relevant information that could be used as an advantageous *point de départ.*

"His crimino-mathematical theory is of course rubbish," said Vance. "Psychology—not abstract science—will eventually reduce this conundrum to its elements. But we need material to go on, and Arnesson knows the inwardness of the Dillard home better than we can ever know it. He knows the Drukkers, and he knows Pardee; and it goes without saying that a man who has had the academic honors heaped on him that he has, possesses an unusually keen mind. As long as he gives his thought and attention to the case, there's the chance that he'll hit upon something of vital importance to us."

"You may be right," grumbled Markham. "But the man's derisive attitude gets on my nerves."

"Be more catholic," urged Vance. "Consider his ironies in relation to his scientific speculations. What could be more natural than that a man who projects his mind constantly into the vast interplanet'ry reaches, and deals with light-years and infinities and hyperphysical dimensions, should sniff derisively at the infinitesimals of this life? . . . Stout fella, Arnesson. Not homey and comfortable perhaps, but dashed interestin'."

Vance himself had taken the case with unwonted seriousness. His Menander translations had been definitely put aside. He became moody and waspish —a sure sign that his mind was busy with an absorbing problem. After dinner each night he went into his library and read for hours—not the classic and æsthetic volumes on which he generally spent his time, but such books as Bernard Hart's "The Psy-

chology of Insanity," Freud's "Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten," Coriat's "Abnormal Psychology" and "Repressed Emotions," Lippo's "Komik und Humor," Daniel A. Huebsch's "The Murder Complex," Janet's "Les Obsessions et la Psychasthènie," Donath's "Uber Arithmomanie," Riklin's "Wish Fulfillment and Fairy Tales," Leppman's "Die forensische Bedeutung der Zwangsvorstellungen," Kuno Fischer's "Uber den Witz," Erich Wulffen's "Kriminalpsychologie," Hollenden's "The Insanity of Genius," and Groos's "Die Spiele des Menschen."

He spent hours going over the police reports. He called twice at the Dillards', and on one occasion visited Mrs. Drukker in company with Belle Dillard. He had a long discussion one night with Drukker and Arnesson on de Sitter's conception of physical space as a Lobatchewskian pseudosphere, his object being, I surmised, to acquaint himself with Drukker's mentality. He read Drukker's book, "World Lines in Multidimensional Continua"; and spent nearly an entire day studying Janowski's and Tarrasch's analyses of the Pardee gambit.

On Sunday—eight days after the murder of Robin—he said to me:

"*Eheu*, Van! This problem is unbelievedly subtle. No ordin'ry investigation will ever probe it. It lies in a strange territ'ry of the brain; and its superficial childishness is its most terrible and bafflin' aspect. Nor is the perpetrator going to be content with a single coup. Cock Robin's death serves no definitive end. The perverted imagination that concocted this beastly crime is insatiable; and unless we can expose the abnormal psychological mechanism back of it

there will be more grim jokes to contend with. . . ."

The very next morning his prognostication was verified. We went to Markham's office at eleven o'clock to hear Heath's report and to discuss further lines of action. Though nine days had passed since Robin had been found murdered, no progress had been made in the case, and the newspapers had grown bitter in their criticisms of the police and the District Attorney's office. It was therefore with considerable depression that Markham greeted us that Monday morning. Heath had not yet arrived; but when he came a few minutes later it was obvious that he, too, was discouraged.

"We run up against a brick wall, sir, every way we turn," he repined, when he had outlined the results of his men's activities. "There ain't a sign of a motive, and outside of Sperling there's nobody on the landscape that we can hang anything on. I'm coming to the conclusion that it was some stick-up man who ambled into the archery-room that morning and messed things up."

"'Stick-up' men, Sergeant," countered Vance, "are deuced unimaginative, and they're without a sense of humor; whereas the johnny who sent Robin on the long, long trail had both imagination and humor. He wasn't content merely to kill Robin: he had to turn the act into an insane joke. Then, lest the public wouldn't see the point, he wrote explanat'ry letters to the press.—Does that sound like the procedure of an itinerant thug?"

Heath smoked unhappily for several minutes without speaking, and at length turned a gaze of exasperated dismay upon Markham.

"There's no sense in anything that's breaking

round this town lately," he complained. "Just this morning a guy named Sprigg was shot in Riverside Park, up near 84th Street. Money in his pocket—nothing taken. Just shot. Young fella—student at Columbia. Lived with his parents; no enemies. Went out to take his usual walk before going to class. Found dead half an hour later by a bricklayer." The Sergeant chewed viciously on his cigar. "Now we got that homicide to worry about; and we'll probably get hell from the newspapers if we don't clear it up *pronto*. And there's nothing—absolutely nothing—to go on."

"Still, Sergeant," said Vance consolingly, "shooting a man is an ordin'ry event. There are numerous commonplace reasons for that sort of crime. It's the scenic and dramatic appurtenances of Robin's murder that play havoc with all our processes of deduction. If only it wasn't a nursery affair——"

Suddenly he stopped speaking, and his eyelids drooped slightly. Leaning forward he very deliberately crushed out his cigarette.

"Did you say, Sergeant, that this chap's name was Sprigg?"

Heath nodded gloomily.

"And I say,"—despite Vance's effort, there was a note of eagerness in his tone—"what was his first name?"

Heath gave Vance a look of puzzled surprise; but after a brief pause he drew forth his battered notebook and riffled the pages.

"John Sprigg," he answered. "John E. Sprigg."

Vance took out another cigarette, and lighted it with great care.

"And tell me: was he shot with a .32?"

"Huh?" Heath's eyes rounded, and his chin shot forward. "Yes, a .32. . . ."

"And was he shot through the top of his head?"

The Sergeant sprang to his feet, and stared at Vance with ludicrous bewilderment. Slowly his head moved up and down.

"That's right.—But how in hell, sir——?"

Vance held up a silencing hand. It was, however, the look on his face, rather than his gesture, that cut short the query.

"Oh, my precious aunt!" He rose like a man in a daze and gazed fixedly before him. Had I not known him so well I would have sworn he was frightened. Then going to the tall window behind Markham's desk he stood looking down on the gray stone walls of the Tombs.

"I can't credit it," he murmured. "It's too ghastly. . . . But of course it's so! . . ."

Markham's impatient voice sounded.

"What's all this mumbling about, Vance? Don't be so damned mysterious! How did you happen to know that Sprigg was shot through the crown with a .32? And what's the point, anyway?"

Vance turned and met Markham's eyes.

"Don't you see?" he asked softly. "It's the second act of this devilish parody! . . . Have you forgotten your 'Mother-Goose'?" And in a hushed voice that brought a sense of unutterable horror into that dingy old office he recited:

" 'There was a little man,
And he had a little gun,
And his bullets were made of lead, lead, lead;

He shot Johnny Sprig
Through the middle of his wig,
And knocked it right off of his head, head, head.' "

CHAPTER IX

THE TENSOR FORMULA

(Monday, April 11; 11.30 a. m.)

Markham sat staring at Vance like a man hypnotized. Heath stood rigid, his mouth partly open, his cigar held a few inches from his lips. There was something almost comic in the Sergeant's attitude, and I had a nervous inclination to laugh; but for the moment my blood seemed frozen, and all muscular movement was impossible.

Markham was the first to speak. Jerking his head backward, he brought his hand down violently on the desk-top.

"What new lunacy of yours is this?" He was fighting desperately against Vance's dumbfounding suggestion. "I'm beginning to think the Robin case has affected your mind. Can't a man with the commonplace name of Sprigg be shot without your trying to turn it into some grotesque hocus-pocus?"

"Still, you must admit, Markham old dear," returned Vance mildly, "this particular Johnny Sprigg was shot with 'a little gun', through 'the middle of his wig', so to speak."

"What if he was?" A dull flush had crept into Markham's face. "Is that any reason for your going about babbling Mother-Goose rhymes?"

"Oh, I say! I never babble, don't y' know." Vance had dropped into a chair facing the District

Attorney's desk. "I may not be a thrillin' elocutionist; but really, now, I don't babble." He gave Heath an ingratiating smile. "Do I, Sergeant?"

But Heath had no opinion to express. He still held his astonished pose, though his eyes had now become mere slits in his broad, pugnacious face.

"Are you seriously suggesting——?" began Markham; but Vance interrupted him.

"Yes! I'm seriously suggesting that the person who killed Cock Robin with an arrow has vented his grim humor upon the hapless Sprigg. Coincidence is out of the question. Such repetitive parallels would knock the entire foundation out from all sanity and reason. 'Pon my soul, the world is mad enough; but such madness would dissipate all science and rational thinking. Sprigg's death is rather hideous; but it must be faced. And however much you may force yourself to protest against its incredible implications you'll eventually have to accept them."

Markham had risen, and was pacing nervously up and down.

"I'll grant there are inexplicable elements in this new crime." His combativeness had gone, and his tone had moderated. "But if we assume, even tentatively, that some maniac is at large reconstructing the rhymes of his nursery days, I can't see how it will help us. It would practically close all routine lines of investigation."

"I shouldn't say that, don't y' know." Vance was smoking meditatively. "I'm inclined to think that such an assumption would supply us with a definite basis of inquiry."

"Sure!" snapped Heath with ponderous sarcasm.

"All we gotta do is to go out and find one bug among six million people. A cinch!"

"Don't let the fumes of discouragement overcome you, Sergeant. Our elusive jester is a rather distinctive entomological specimen. Moreover, we have certain clews as to his exact habitat. . . ."

Markham swung round. "What do you mean by that?"

"Merely that this second crime is related to the first not only psychologically, but geographically. Both murders were committed within a few blocks of each other,—our destructive demon at least has a weakness for the neighborhood in which the Dillard house is situated. Furthermore, the very factors of the two murders preclude the possibility of his having come from afar to give rein to his distorted humor in unfamiliar surroundings. As I learnedly pointed out to you, Robin was translated into the Beyond by some one who knew all the conditions obtaining at the Dillard house at the exact hour the grisly drama was performed; and surely it's obvious that this second crime could not have been so tidily staged had not the impresario been acquainted with Sprigg's ambulat'ry intentions this morning. Indeed, the entire mechanism of these weird playlets proves that the operator was intimately cognizant of all the circumstances surrounding his victims."

The heavy silence that followed was broken by Heath.

"If you're right, Mr. Vance, then that lets Sperling out." The Sergeant made even this qualified admission reluctantly; but it showed that Vance's argument had not been without its effect on him.

He turned desperately to the District Attorney. "What do you think we'd better do, sir?"

Markham was still battling against the acceptance of Vance's theory, and he did not answer. Presently, however, he reseated himself at his desk and drummed with his fingers upon the blotter. Then, without looking up, he asked:

"Who's in charge of the Sprigg case, Sergeant?"

"Captain Pitts. The local men at the 68th-Street Station grabbed it first; but when the news was relayed to the Bureau, Pitts and a couple of our boys went up to look into it. Pitts got back just before I came over here. Says it's a washout. But Inspector Moran* told him to stay with it."

Markham pressed the buzzer beneath the edge of his desk, and Swacker, his youthful secretary, appeared at the swinging door that led to the clerical room between the District Attorney's private office and the main waiting-room.

"Get Inspector Moran on the wire," he ordered.

When the connection had been made he drew the telephone toward him and spoke for several minutes. When he had replaced the receiver, he gave Heath a weary smile.

"You're now officially handling the Sprigg case, Sergeant. Captain Pitts will be here presently, and then we'll know where we stand." He began looking through a pile of papers before him. "I've got to be convinced," he added half-heartedly, "that Sprigg and Robin are tied up in the same sack."

*Inspector William M. Moran, who died two years ago, was, at the time of the Bishop case, the Commanding Officer of the Detective Bureau.

Pitts, a short, stocky man, with a lean, hard face and a black tooth-brush moustache, arrived ten minutes later. He was, I learned afterwards, one of the most competent men in the Detective Division. His specialty was "white-collar" gangsters. He shook hands with Markham and gave Heath a companionable leer. When introduced to Vance and me he focussed suspicious eyes on us and bowed grudgingly. But as he was about to turn away his expression suddenly changed.

"Mr. Philo Vance, is it?" he asked.

"Alas! So it seems, Captain," Vance sighed.

Pitts grinned and, stepping forward, held out his hand.

"Glad to meet you, sir. Heard the Sergeant speak of you often."

"Mr. Vance is helping us unofficially with the Robin case, Captain," explained Markham; "and since this man Sprigg was killed in the same neighborhood we thought we'd like to hear your preliminary report on the affair." He took out a box of Corona *Perfectos*, and pushed it across the desk.

"You needn't put the request that way, sir." The Captain smiled, and selecting a cigar held it to his nose with a kind of voluptuous satisfaction. "The Inspector told me you had some ideas about this new case, and wanted to take it on. To tell you the truth, I'm glad to get rid of it." He sat down leisurely, and lighted his cigar. "What would you like to know, sir?"

"Let us have the whole story," said Markham.

Pitts settled himself comfortably.

"Well, I happened to be on hand when the case

came through—a little after eight this morning—and I took a couple of the boys and beat it up-town. The local men were on the job, and an assistant Medical Examiner arrived the same time I did. . . ."

"Did you hear his report, Captain?" asked Vance.

"Sure. Sprigg was shot through the top of the head with a .32. No signs of a struggle—no bruises or anything. Nothing fancy. Just a straight shooting."

"Was he lying on his back when found?"

"That's right. Stretched out nice and pretty, right in the middle of the walk."

"And wasn't his skull fractured where he'd fallen on the asphalt?" The question was put negligently.

Pitts took his cigar from his mouth and gave Vance a sly look.

"I guess maybe you fellows over here do know something about this case." He nodded his head sagaciously. "Yes, the back of the guy's skull was all bashed in. He sure had a tough fall. But I guess he didn't feel it—not with that bullet in his brain. . . ."

"Speaking of the shot, Captain, didn't anything about it strike you as peculiar?"

"Well . . . yes," Pitts admitted, rolling his cigar meditatively between his thumb and forefinger. "The top of a guy's head isn't where I'd ordinarily look for a bullet-hole. And his hat wasn't touched,—it must have fallen off before he was potted. You might call those facts peculiar, Mr. Vance."

"Yes, Captain, they're dashed peculiar. . . . And I take it the pistol was held at close range."

"Not more'n a couple of inches away. The hair

was singed round the hole." He made a broad gesture of inconsequence. "Still and all, the guy might have seen the other fellow draw the gun, and ducked forward, spilling his hat. That would account for his getting the shot at close range in the top of the head."

"Quite, quite. Except that, in that case, he wouldn't have fallen over back, but would have pitched forward on his face. . . . But go on with the story, Captain."

Pitts gave Vance a look of crafty agreement, and continued.

"The first thing I did was to go through the fellow's pockets. He had a good gold watch on him and about fifteen dollars in bills and silver. So it didn't look like a robbery—unless the guy that shot him got panicky and beat it. But that didn't seem likely, for there's never any one round that part of the park early in the morning; and the walk there dips under a stone bluff, so that the view is cut off. The bird that did the job certainly picked a swell place for it. . . . Anyhow, I left a couple of men to guard the body till the wagon came for it, and went up to Sprigg's house in 93rd Street,—I'd got his name and address from a couple of letters in his pocket. I found out he was a student at Columbia, living with his parents, and that it was his habit to take a walk in the park after breakfast. He left home this morning about half past seven. . . ."

"Ah! It was his habit to promenade in the park each morning," murmured Vance. "Most interestin'."

"Even so, that don't get us anywheres," returned

Pitts. "Plenty of fellows take an early constitutional. And there was nothing unusual about Sprigg this morning. He wasn't worried about anything, his folks told me; and was cheerful enough when he said good-bye to 'em.—After that I hopped up to the university and made inquiries; talked to a couple of the students that knew him, and also to one of the instructors. Sprigg was a quiet sort of chap. Didn't make friends and kept pretty much to himself. Serious bird—always working at his studies. Stood high in his classes, and was never seen going around with Janes. Didn't like women, in fact. Wasn't what you'd call sociable. From all reports he was the last man to get in a mess of any kind. That's why I can't see anything special in his getting shot. It must have been an accident of some kind. Might have been taken for somebody else."

"And he was found at what time?"

"About quarter of eight. A bricklayer on the new 79th-Street dock was cutting across the embankment toward the railway tracks, and saw him. He notified one of the post officers on the Drive, who phoned in to the local station."

"And Sprigg left his home in 93rd Street at half past seven." Vance gazed at the ceiling meditatively. "Therefore he would have had just enough time to reach this point in the park before being killed. It looks as if some one who knew his habits was waiting for him. Neatness and dispatch, what? . . . It doesn't appear exactly fortuitous, does it, Markham?"

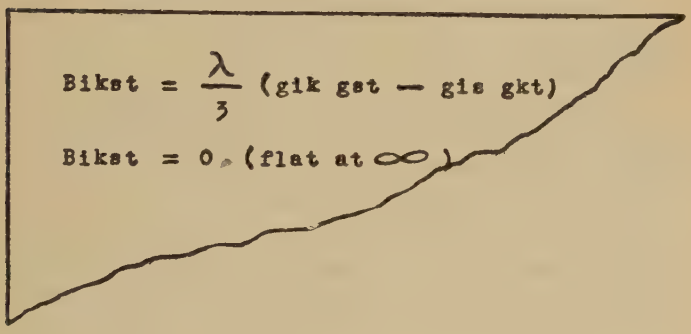
Ignoring the jibe Markham addressed Pitts.

"Was there nothing found that could possibly be used as a lead?"

"No, sir. My men combed the spot pretty thoroughly, but nothing showed up."

"And in Sprigg's pockets—among his papers. . . ?"

"Not a thing. I've got all the stuff at the Bureau —a couple of ordinary letters, a few odds and ends



of the usual kind. . . ." He paused as if suddenly remembering something, and pulled out a dog-eared note-book. "There was this," he said unenthusiastically, handing a torn, triangular scrap of paper to Markham. "It was found under the fellow's body. It don't mean anything, but I stuck it in my pocket —force of habit."

The paper was not more than four inches long, and appeared to have been torn from the corner of an ordinary sheet of unruled stationery. It contained part of a typewritten mathematical formula, with the lambda, the equals and the infinity sign marked in with pencil. I reproduce the paper here,

for, despite its seeming irrelevancy, it was to play a sinister and amazing part in the investigation of Sprigg's death.

Vance glanced only casually at the exhibit, but Markham held it in his hand frowning at it for several moments. He was about to make some comment when he caught Vance's eye; and, instead, he tossed the paper to the desk carelessly with a slight shrug.

"Is this everything you found?"

"That's all, sir."

Markham rose.

"We're very grateful to you, Captain. I don't know what we'll be able to make out of this Sprigg case, but we'll look into it." He pointed to the box of *Perfectos*. "Put a couple in your pocket before you go."

"Much obliged, sir." Pitts selected the cigars, and placing them tenderly in his waistcoat pocket, shook hands with all of us.

When he had gone Vance got up with alacrity, and bent over the scrap of paper on Markham's desk.

"My word!" He took out his monocle and studied the symbols for several moments. "Most allurin'. Now where have I seen that formula recently? . . . Ah! The Riemann-Christoffel tensor—of course! Drukker uses it in his book for determining the Gaussian curvature of spherical and homaloidal space. . . . But what was Sprigg doing with it? The formula is considerably beyond the college curricula. . . ." He held the paper up to the light. "It's the same stock as that on which the Bishop notes are written. And you probably observed that the typing is also similar."

Heath had stepped forward, and now scrutinized the paper.

"It's the same, all right." The fact seemed to nonplus him. "That's a link anyway between the two crimes."

Vance's eyes took on a puzzled look.

"A link—yes. But the presence of the formula under Sprigg's body appears as irrational as the murder itself. . . ."

Markham moved uneasily.

"You say it is a formula that Drukker uses in his book?"

"Yes. But the fact doesn't necessarily involve him. The tensor is known to all advanced mathematicians. It is one of the technical expressions used in non-Euclidean geometry; and though it was discovered by Riemann in connection with a concrete problem in physics,* it has now become of widespread importance in the mathematics of relativity. It's highly scientific in the abstract sense, and can have no direct bearing on Sprigg's murder." He sat down again. "Arnesson will be delighted with the find. He may be able to work out some astonishing conclusion from it."

"I see no reason," protested Markham, "to inform Arnesson of this new case. My idea would be to keep it under cover as much as possible."

"The Bishop won't let you, I fear," returned Vance.

Markham set his jaw.

* This expression was actually developed by Christoffel for a problem on the conductivity of heat, and published by him in 1869 in the "Crelle Journal für reine und angewandte Mathematik."

"Good God!" he burst out. "What damnable sort of thing are we facing? I expect every minute to wake up and discover I've been living a nightmare."

"No such luck, sir," growled Heath. He took a resolute breath like a man preparing for combat. "What's on the cards? Where do we go from here? I need action."

Markham appealed to Vance.

"You seem to have some idea about this affair. What's your suggestion? I frankly admit I'm floundering about in a black chaos."

Vance inhaled deeply on his cigarette. Then he leaned forward as if to give emphasis to his words.

"Markham old man, there's only one conclusion to be drawn. These two murders were engineered by the same brain: both sprang from the same grotesque impulse; and since the first of them was committed by some one intimately familiar with conditions inside the Dillard house, it follows that we must now look for a person who, in addition to that knowledge, had definite information that a man named John Sprigg was in the habit of taking a walk each morning in a certain part of Riverside Park. Having found such a person, we must check up on the points of time, place, opportunity, and possible motive. There's some interrelation between Sprigg and the Dillards. What it is I don't know. But our first move should be to find out. What better starting-point than the Dillard house itself?"

"We'll get some lunch first," said Markham wearily. "Then we'll run out there."

CHAPTER X

A REFUSAL OF AID

(Monday, April 11; 2 p. m.)

It was shortly after two o'clock when we reached the Dillard house. Pyne answered our ring; and if our visit caused him any surprise he succeeded admirably in hiding it. In the look he gave Heath, however, I detected a certain uneasiness; but when he spoke his voice had the flat, unctuous quality of the well-trained servant.

"Mr. Arnesson has not returned from the university," he informed us.

"Mind-reading, I see," said Vance, "is not your *forte*, Pyne. We called to see you and Professor Dillard."

The man looked ill at ease; but before he could answer Miss Dillard appeared in the archway of the drawing-room.

"I thought I recognized your voice, Mr. Vance." She included us all in a smile of wistful welcome. "Please come in. . . . Lady Mae dropped in for a few minutes,—we're going riding together this afternoon," she explained, as we entered the room.

Mrs. Drukker stood by the centre-table, one bony hand on the back of the chair from which she had evidently just risen. There was fear in her eyes as she stared at us unblinkingly; and her lean features seemed almost contorted. She made no effort to

speak, but stood rigidly as if waiting for some dread pronouncement, like a convicted prisoner at the bar about to receive sentence.

Belle Dillard's pleasant voice relieved the tensity of the situation.

"I'll run up and tell uncle you're here."

She had no sooner quitted the room than Mrs. Drukker leaned over the table and said to Markham in a sepulchral, awe-stricken whisper: "I know why you've come! It's about that fine young man who was shot in the park this morning."

So amazing and unexpected were her words that Markham could make no immediate answer; and it was Vance who replied.

"You have heard of the tragedy, then, Mrs. Drukker? How could the news have come to you so soon?"

A look of canniness came into the woman's expression, giving her the appearance of an evil old witch.

"Every one is talking about it in the neighborhood," she answered evasively.

"Indeed? That's most unfortunate. But why do you assume we have come here to make inquiries about it?"

"Wasn't the young man's name Johnny Sprigg?" A faint, terrible smile accompanied the question.

"So it was. John E. Sprigg. Still, that does not explain his connection with the Dillards."

"Ah, but it does!" Her head moved up and down with a sort of horrible satisfaction. "It's a game—a child's game. First Cock Robin . . . then Johnny Sprig. Children must play—all healthy children must play." Her mood suddenly changed. A softness shone on her face, and her eyes grew sad.

"It's a rather diabolical game, don't you think, Mrs. Drukker?"

"And why not? Isn't life itself diabolical?"

"For some of us—yes." A curious sympathy informed Vance's words as he gazed at this strange tragic creature before us. "Tell me," he went on quickly, in an altered tone; "do you know who the Bishop is?"

"The Bishop?" She frowned perplexedly. "No, I don't know him. Is that another child's game?"

"Something of that kind, I imagine. At any rate, the Bishop is interested in Cock Robin and Johnny Sprig. In fact, he may be the person who is making up these fantastic games. And we're looking for him, Mrs. Drukker. We hope to learn the truth from him."

The woman shook her head vaguely. "I don't know him." Then she glared vindictively at Markham. "But it's not going to do you any good to try to find out who killed Cock Robin and shot Johnny Sprig through the middle of his wig. You'll never learn—never—*never*. . . ." Her voice had risen excitedly, and a fit of trembling seized her.

At this moment Belle Dillard re-entered the room, and going quickly to Mrs. Drukker put her arm about her.

"Come," she said soothingly; "we'll have a long drive in the country, Lady Mae." Reproachfully she turned to Markham, and said coldly: "Uncle wishes you to come to the library." With that she led Mrs. Drukker from the room and down the hall.

"Now that's a queer one, sir," commented Heath, who had stood looking on with bewildered amaze-

ment. "She had the dope on this Johnny-Sprig stuff all the time!"

Vance nodded.

"And our appearance here frightened her. Still, her mind is morbid and sensitive, Sergeant; and dwelling as she does constantly on her son's deformity and the early days when he was like other children, it's quite possible she merely hit accidentally upon the Mother-Goose significance of Robin's and Sprigg's death. . . . I wonder." He looked toward Markham. "There are strange undercurrents in this case—incredible and terrifying implications. It's like being lost in the Dovrë-Troll caverns of Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt,' where only monstrosities and abnormalities exist." He shrugged his shoulders, though I knew he had not wholly escaped the pall of horror cast on us by Mrs. Drukker's words. "Perhaps we can find a little solid footing with Professor Dillard."

The professor received us without enthusiasm and with but scant cordiality. His desk was littered with papers, and it was obvious that we had disturbed him in the midst of his labors.

"Why this unexpected visit, Markham?" he asked, after we had seated ourselves. "Have you something to report on Robin's death?" He marked a page in Weyl's "Space, Time and Matter" and, settling back reluctantly, regarded us with impatience. "I'm very busy working on a problem of Mach's mechanics. . . ."

"I regret," said Markham, "I have nothing to report on the Robin case. But there has been another murder in this neighborhood to-day, and we have reason to believe that it may be connected with

Robin's death. What I wanted particularly to ask you, sir, is whether or not the name of John E. Sprigg is familiar to you."

Professor Dillard's expression of annoyance changed quickly.

"Is that the name of the man who was killed?" There was no longer any lack of interest in his attitude.

"Yes. A man named John E. Sprigg was shot in Riverside Park, near 84th Street, this morning shortly after half past seven."

The professor's eyes wandered to the mantelpiece, and he was silent for several moments. He seemed to be debating inwardly some point that troubled him.

"Yes," he said at length, "I—we—do know a young man of that name—though it's wholly unlikely he's the same one."

"Who is he?" Markham's voice was eagerly insistent.

Again the professor hesitated.

"The lad I have in mind is Arnesson's prize student in mathematics—what they'd call at Cambridge a senior wrangler."

"How do you happen to know him, sir?"

"Arnesson has brought him to the house here several times. Wanted me to see him and talk to him. Arnesson was quite proud of the boy; and I must admit he showed unusual talent."

"Then he was known to all the members of the household?"

"Yes. Belle met him, I think. And if by 'the household' you include Pyne and Beedle, I should say the name was probably familiar to them too."

Vance asked the next question.

"Did the Drukkers know Sprigg, Professor Dillard?"

"It's quite possible. Arnesson and Drukker see each other a great deal. . . . Come to think of it, I believe Drukker was here one night when Sprigg called."

"And Pardee: did he also know Sprigg?"

"As to that I couldn't say." The professor tapped impatiently on the arm of his chair, and turned back to Markham. "See here"—his voice held a worried petulance—"what's the point of these questions? What has our knowing a student named Sprigg to do with this morning's affair? Surely you don't mean to tell me that the man who was killed was Arnesson's pupil."

"I'm afraid it's true," said Markham.

There was a note of anxiety—of fear almost, I thought—in the professor's voice when he next spoke.

"Even so, what can that fact have to do with us? And how can you possibly connect his death with Robin's?"

"I admit we have nothing definite to go on," Markham told him. "But the purposelessness of both crimes—the total lack of any motive in either case—seems to give them a curious unity of aspect."

"You mean, of course, that you have found no motive. But if all crimes without apparent motive were assumed to be connected——"

"Also there are the elements of time and proximity in these two cases," Markham amplified.

"Is that the basis of your assumption?" The professor's manner was benevolently contemptuous. "You never were a good mathematician, Markham,

but at least you should know that no hypothesis can be built on such a flimsy premise."

"Both names," interposed Vance, "—Cock Robin and Johnny Sprig—are the subjects of well-known nursery rhymes."

The old man stared at him with undisguised astonishment; and gradually an angry flush mounted to his face.

"Your humor, sir, is out of place."

"It is not *my* humor, alas!" replied Vance sadly. "The jest is the Bishop's."

"The Bishop?" Professor Dillard strove to curb his irritation. "Look here, Markham; I won't be played with. That's the second mention of a mysterious Bishop that's been made in this room; and I want to know the meaning of it. Even if a crank did write an insane letter to the papers in connection with Robin's death, what has this Bishop to do with Sprigg?"

"A paper was found beneath Sprigg's body bearing a mathematical formula typed on the same machine as the Bishop notes."

"What!" The professor bent forward. "The same machine, you say? And a mathematical formula? . . . What was the formula?"

Markham opened his pocketbook, and held out the triangular scrap of paper that Pitts had given him.

"The Riemann-Christoffel tensor. . . ." Professor Dillard sat for a long time gazing at the paper; then he handed it back to Markham. He seemed suddenly to have grown older; and there was a weary look in his eyes as he lifted them to us. "I don't see any light in this matter." His tone was one of hopeless resignation. "But perhaps you are right in fol-

lowing your present course.—What do you want of me?"

Markham was plainly puzzled by the other's altered attitude.

"I came to you primarily to ascertain if there was any link between Sprigg and this house; but, to be quite candid, I don't see how that link, now that I have it, fits into the chain.—I would, however, like your permission to question Pyne and Beedle in whatever way I think advisable."

"Ask them anything you like, Markham. You shall never be able to accuse me of having stood in your way." He glanced up appealingly. "But you will, I hope, advise me before you take any drastic steps."

"That I can promise you, sir." Markham rose. "But I fear we are a long way from any drastic measures at present." He held out his hand, and from his manner it was evident he had sensed some hidden anxiety in the old man and wanted to express his sympathy without voicing his feelings.

The professor walked with us to the door.

"I can't understand that typed tensor," he murmured, shaking his head. "But if there's anything I can do. . . ."

"There *is* something you can do for us, Professor Dillard," said Vance, pausing at the door. "On the morning Robin was killed we interviewed Mrs. Drukker——"

"Ah!"

"And though she denied having sat at her window during the forenoon there is a possibility she saw something happen on the archery range between eleven and twelve."

"She gave you that impression?" There was an undertone of suppressed interest in the professor's question.

"Only in a remote way. It was Drukker's statement that he had heard his mother scream, and her denial of having screamed, that led me to believe that she might have seen something she preferred to keep from us. And it occurred to me that you would probably have more influence with her than any one else, and that, if she did indeed witness anything, you might prevail upon her to speak."

"No!" Professor Dillard spoke almost harshly; but he immediately placed his hand on Markham's arm, and his tone changed. "There are some things you must not ask me to do for you. If that poor harassed woman saw anything from her window that morning, you must find it out for yourself. I'll have no hand in torturing her; and I sincerely hope you'll not worry her either. There are other ways of finding out what you want to know." He looked straight into Markham's eyes. "*She* must not be the one to tell you. You yourself would be sorry afterwards."

"We must find out what we can," Markham answered resolutely but with kindliness. "There's a fiend loose in this city, and I cannot stay my hand to save any one from suffering—however tragic that suffering may be. But I assure you I shall not unnecessarily torture any one."

"Have you thought," asked Professor Dillard quietly, "that the truth you seek may be more frightful even than the crimes themselves?"

"That I shall have to risk. But even if I knew it to be a fact, it would not deter me in any degree."

"Certainly not. But, Markham, I'm much older than you. I had gray hair when you were a lad struggling with your logs and antilogs; and when one gets old one learns the true proportions in the universe. The ratios all change. The estimates we once placed on things lose their meaning. That's why the old are more forgiving: they know that no man-made values are of any importance."

"But as long as we must live by human values," argued Markham, "it is my duty to uphold them. And I cannot, through any personal sense of sympathy, refuse to take any avenue that may lead to the truth."

"You are perhaps right," the professor sighed. "But you must not ask me to help you in this instance. If you learn the truth, be charitable. Be sure your culprit is accountable before you demand that he be sent to the electric chair. There are diseased minds as well as diseased bodies; and often the two go together."

When we had returned to the drawing-room Vance lighted a cigarette with more than his usual care.

"The professor," he said, "is not at all happy about Sprigg's death; and, though he won't admit it, that tensor formula convinced him that Sprigg and Robin belong to the same equation. But he was convinced dashed easily. Now, why?—Moreover, he didn't care to admit that Sprigg was known hereabouts. I don't say he has suspicions, but he has fears. . . . Deuced funny, his attitude. He apparently doesn't want to obstruct the legal justice which you uphold with such touchin' zeal, Markham; but he most decidedly doesn't care to abet your crusade

where the Drukkers are concerned. I wonder what's back of his consideration for Mrs. Drukker. I shouldn't say, offhand, that the professor was of a sentimental nature.—And what was that platitude about a diseased mind and a diseased body? Sounded like a prospectus for a physical culture class, what? . . . Lackaday! Let's put a few questions to Pyne and kin."

Markham sat smoking moodily. I had rarely seen him so despondent.

"I don't see what we can hope for from them," he commented. "However, Sergeant, get Pyne in here."

When Heath had stepped out Vance gave Markham a waggish look.

"Really, y' know, you shouldn't repine. Let Terence console you:—*Nil tam difficile est, quin quærendo investigari possit.* And, 'pon my soul, this is a difficult problem. . . ." He became suddenly sober. "We're dealing with unknown quantities here. We're pitted against some strange, abnormal force that doesn't operate according to the accepted laws of conduct. It's at once subtle—oh, no end subtle—and unfamiliar. But at least we know that it emanates from somewhere in the environs of this old house; and we must search in every psychological nook and cranny. Somewhere about us lies the invisible dragon. So don't be shocked at the questions I shall put to Pyne. We must look in the most unlikely places. . . ."

Footsteps were heard approaching the archway, and a moment later Heath entered with the old butler in tow.

CHAPTER XI

THE STOLEN REVOLVER

(Monday, April 11; 3 p. m.)

"Sit down, Pyne," said Vance, with peremptory kindness. "We have permission from Professor Dillard to question you; and we shall expect answers to all our questions."

"Certainly, sir," the man answered. "I'm sure there's nothing that Professor Dillard has any reason to hide."

"Excellent." Vance lay back lazily. "To begin with, then; what hour was breakfast served here this morning?"

"At half past eight, sir—the same as always."

"Were all the members of the family present?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Who calls the family in the morning? And at what time?"

"I do myself—at half past seven. I knock on the doors——"

"And wait for an answer?"

"Yes, sir—always."

"Now think, Pyne: did every one answer you this morning?"

The man inclined his head emphatically. "Yes, sir."

"And no one was late to breakfast?"

"Every one was on time promptly—as usual, sir."

Vance leaned over and deposited his cigarette ash in the grate.

"Did you happen to see any one leaving the house or returning to it this morning before breakfast?"

The question was put casually, but I noted a slight quiver of surprise in the butler's thin drooping eyelids.

"No, sir."

"Even though you saw no one," pursued Vance, "would it not have been possible for some member of the household to have gone out and returned without your knowing it?"

Pyne for the first time during the interview appeared reluctant to answer.

"Well, sir, the fact is," he said uneasily, "any one might have used the front door this morning without my knowing it, as I was in the dining-room setting table. And, for the matter of that, any one might have used the archery-room door, for my daughter generally keeps the kitchen door closed while preparing breakfast."

Vance smoked thoughtfully a moment. Then in an even, matter-of-fact tone he asked: "Does any one in the house own a revolver?"

The man's eyes opened wide.

"Not that I—know of, sir," he answered haltingly.

"Ever hear of the Bishop, Pyne?"

"Oh, no, sir!" His face blanched. "You mean the man who wrote those letters to the papers?"

"I merely meant the Bishop," said Vance carelessly. "But tell me: have you heard anything about a man being killed in Riverside Park this morning?"

"Yes, sir. The janitor next door was telling me about it."

"You knew young Mr. Sprigg, didn't you?"

"I'd seen him at the house here once or twice, sir."

"Was he here recently?"

"Last week, sir. Thursday I think it was."

"Who else was here at the time?"

Pyne frowned as if trying to remember.

"Mr. Drukker, sir," he said after a moment. "And, as I recall, Mr. Pardee came too. They were together in Mr. Arnesson's room talking until late."

"In Mr. Arnesson's room, eh? Is it custom'ry for Mr. Arnesson to receive callers in his room?"

"No, sir," Pyne explained; "but the professor was working in the library, and Miss Dillard was with Mrs. Drukker in the drawing-room here."

Vance was silent a while.

"That will be all, Pyne," he said at length. "But please send Beedle to us at once."

Beedle came and stood before us with sullen aggressiveness. Vance questioned her along the same lines as he had taken with Pyne. Her answers, for the most part monosyllabic, added nothing to what had already been learned. But at the end of the brief interview Vance asked her if she had happened to look out of the kitchen window that morning before breakfast.

"I looked out once or twice," she answered defiantly. "Why shouldn't I look out?"

"Did you see any one on the archery range or in the rear yard?"

"No one but the professor and Mrs. Drukker."

"No strangers?" Vance strove to give the impres-

sion that the fact of Professor Dillard's and Mrs. Drukker's presence in the rear yard that morning was of no importance; but, by the slow, deliberate way in which he reached into his pocket for his cigarette-case, I knew the information had interested him keenly.

"No," the woman replied curtly.

"What time did you notice the professor and Mrs. Drukker?"

"Eight o'clock maybe."

"Were they talking together?"

"Yes.—Anyway," she emended, "they were walking up and down near the arbor."

"Is it custom'ry for them to stroll in the yard before breakfast?"

"Mrs. Drukker often comes out early and walks about the flower beds. And I guess the professor has a right to walk in his own yard any time he wants to."

"I'm not questioning his rights in the matter, Beedle," said Vance mildly. "I was merely wondering if he was in the habit of exercising those rights at such an early hour."

"Well, he was exercising 'em this morning."

Vance dismissed the woman and, rising, went to the front window. He was patently puzzled, and he stood several minutes looking down the street toward the river.

"Well, well," he murmured. "It's a nice day for communin' with nature. At eight this morning the lark was on the wing no doubt, and—who knows?—maybe there was a snail on the thorn. But—my word!—all wasn't right with the world."

Markham recognized the signs of Vance's perplexity.

"What do you make of it?" he asked. "I'm inclined to ignore Beedle's information."

"The trouble is, Markham, we can't afford to ignore anything in this case." Vance spoke softly, without turning. "I'll admit, though, that at present Beedle's revelation is meaningless. We've merely learned that two of the actors in our melodrama were up and about this morning shortly after Sprigg was snuffed out. The al-fresco rendezvous between the professor and Mrs. Drukker may, of course, be just one of your beloved coincidences. On the other hand, it may have some bearing on the old gentleman's sentimental attitude toward the lady. . . . I think we'll have to make a few discreet inquiries of him about his ante-prandial tryst, what? . . ."

He leaned suddenly toward the window.

"Ah! Here comes Arnesson. Looks a bit excited."

A few moments later there was the sound of a key in the front door, and Arnesson strode down the hall. When he saw us he came quickly into the drawing-room and, without a word of greeting, burst forth:

"What's this I hear about Sprigg being shot?" His eager eyes darted from one to the other of us. "I suppose you're here to ask me about him. Well, fire away." He threw a bulky brief-case on the centre-table and sat down abruptly on the edge of a straight chair. "There was a detective up at college this morning asking fool questions and acting like a burlesque sleuth in a comic opera. Very mysterious. . . . Murder—horrible murder! What did we know

about a certain John E. Sprigg? And so on. . . . Scared a couple of juniors out of an entire semester's mental growth, and sent a harmless young English instructor into incipient nervous collapse. I didn't see the Dogberry myself—was in class at the time. But he had the cheek to ask what women Sprigg went around with. Sprigg and women! That boy didn't have a thought in his head but his work. Brightest man in senior math. Never missed a class. When he didn't answer roll-call this morning I knew something serious was the matter. At the lunch hour every one was buzzing about murder. . . . What's the answer?"

"We haven't the answer, Mr. Arnesson." Vance had been watching him closely. "However, we have another determinant for your formula. Johnny Sprig was shot this morning with a little gun through the middle of his wig."

Arnesson stared at Vance for some time without moving. Then he threw his head back and gave a sardonic laugh.

"Some more mumbo-jumbo, eh?—like the death of Cock Robin. . . . Read me the rune."

Vance gave him briefly the details of the crime.

"That's all we know at present," he concluded. "Could *you*, Mr. Arnesson, add any suggestive details?"

"Good Lord, no!" The man appeared genuinely amazed. "Not a thing. Sprigg . . . one of the keenest students I ever had. Something of a genius, by Gad! Too bad his parents named him John—plenty of other names. It sealed his doom apparently; got him shot through the head by a maniac.

Obviously the same merry-andrew who did Robin in with an arrow." He rubbed his hands together,—the abstract philosopher in him had become uppermost. "A nice problem. You've told me everything? I'll need every known integer. Maybe I'll hit upon a new mathematical method in the process—like Kepler." He chuckled over the conceit. "Remember Kepler's 'Doliometrie'? It became the foundation of Infinitesimal Calculus. He arrived at it trying to construct a cask for his wine—a cask with a minimum amount of wood and a maximum cubical content. Maybe the formulas I work out to solve these crimes will open up new fields of scientific research. Ha! Robin and Sprigg will then become martyrs."

The man's humor, even taking into consideration his life's passion for abstractions, struck me as particularly distasteful. But Vance seemed not to mind his cold-blooded cynicism.

"There's one item," he said, "that I omitted to mention." Turning to Markham he asked for the piece of paper containing the formula, and handed it to Arnesson. "This was found beneath Sprigg's body."

The other scrutinized it superciliously.

"The Bishop, I see, is again involved. Same paper and typing as the notes. . . . But where did he get that Riemann-Christoffel tensor? Now, if it had been some other tensor—like the G-sigma-tau, for instance—any one interested in practical physics might have hit on it. But this one isn't common; and the statement of it here is arbitrary and unusual. Certain terms omitted. . . . *By George!* I was talk-

ing to Sprigg about this only the other night. He wrote it down, too."

"Pyne mentioned the fact that Sprigg had called here Thursday night," put in Vance.

"Oh, he did, did he? . . . Thursday—that's right. Pardee was here, too. And Drukker. We had a discussion on Gaussian co-ordinates. This tensor came up—Drukker mentioned it first, I think. And Pardee had some mad notion of applying the higher mathematics to chess. . . ."

"Do you play chess, by the by?" asked Vance.

"Used to. But no more. A beautiful game, though—if it wasn't for the players. Queer crabs, chess players."

"Did you ever make any study of the Pardee gambit?" (At the time I could not understand the seeming irrelevance of Vance's questions; and I noticed that Markham too was beginning to show signs of impatience.)

"Poor old Pardee!" Arnesson smiled unfeelingly. "Not a bad elementary mathematician. Should have been a high-school teacher. Too much money, though. Took to chess. I told him his gambit was unscientific. Even showed him how it could be beaten. But he couldn't see it. Then Capablanca, Vidmar and Tartakower came along and knocked it into a cocked hat. Just as I told him they would. Wrecked his life. He's been fussing around with another gambit for years, but can't make it cohere. Reads Weyl, Silberstein, Eddington and Mach in the hope of getting inspiration."

"That's most interestin'." Vance extended his match-case to Arnesson, who had been filling his pipe

as he talked. "Was Pardee well acquainted with Sprigg?"

"Oh, no. Met him here twice—that's all. Pardee knows Drukker well, though. Always asking him about potentials and scalars and vectors. Hopes to hit on something that'll revolutionize chess."

"Was he interested in the Riemann-Christoffel tensor when you discussed it the other night?"

"Can't say that he was. A bit out of his realm. You can't hitch the curvature of space-time to a chess-board."

"What do you make of this formula being found on Sprigg?"

"Don't make anything of it. If it had been in Sprigg's handwriting I'd say it dropped out of his pocket. But who'd go to the trouble of trying to type a mathematical formula?"

"The Bishop apparently."

Arnesson took his pipe from his mouth and grinned.

"Bishop X. We'll have to find him. He's full of whimsies. Perverted sense of values."

"Obviously." Vance spoke languidly. "And, by the by, I almost forgot to ask you: does the Dillard house harbor any revolvers?"

"Oho!" Arnesson chuckled with unrestrained delight. "Sits the wind there? . . . Sorry to disappoint you. No revolvers. No sliding doors. No secret stairways. All open and above-board."

Vance sighed theatrically.

"Sad . . . sad! And I had such a comfortin' theory."

Belle Dillard had come silently down the hall, and now stood in the archway. She had evidently heard Vance's question and Arnesson's answer.

"But there *are* two revolvers in the house, Sigurd," she declared. "Don't you remember the old revolvers I used for target practice in the country?"

"Thought you'd thrown 'em away long ago." Arnesson rose and drew up a chair for her. "I told you when we returned from Hopatcong that summer that only burglars and bandits are allowed to own guns in this benevolent State. . . ."

"But I didn't believe you," the girl protested. "I never know when you're jesting and when you're serious."

"And you kept them, Miss Dillard?" came Vance's quiet voice.

"Why—yes." She shot an apprehensive glance at Heath. "Shouldn't I have done so?"

"I believe it was technically illegal. However"—Vance smiled reassuringly—"I don't think the Sergeant will invoke the Sullivan law against you.—Where are they now?"

"Down-stairs—in the archery-room. They're in one of the drawers of the tool-chest."

Vance rose.

"Would you be so good, Miss Dillard, as to show us where you put them? I have a gnawin' curiosity to see 'em, don't y' know."

The girl hesitated and looked to Arnesson for guidance. When he nodded she turned without a word and led the way to the archery-room.

"They're in that chest by the window," she said.

Going to it she drew out a small deep drawer in one end. At the rear, beneath a mass of odds and ends, was a .38 Colt automatic.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "There's only one here. The other is gone."

"It was a smaller pistol, wasn't it?" asked Vance.

"Yes. . . ."

"A .32?"

The girl nodded and turned bewildered eyes on Arnesson.

"Well, it's gone, Belle," he told her, with a shrug. "Can't be helped. Probably one of your young archers took it to blow out his brains with after he'd foozled at shooting arrows up the alley."

"Do be serious, Sigurd," she pleaded, a little frightened. "Where could it have gone?"

"Ha! Another dark mystery," scoffed Arnesson. "Strange disappearance of a discarded .32."

Seeing the girl's uneasiness Vance changed the subject.

"Perhaps, Miss Dillard, you'd be good enough to take us to Mrs. Drukker. There are one or two matters we want to speak to her about; and I assume, by your presence here, that the ride in the country has been postponed."

A shadow of distress passed over the girl's face.

"Oh, you mustn't bother her to-day." Her tone was tragically appealing. "Lady Mae is very ill. I can't understand it—she seemed so well when I was talking with her up-stairs. But after she'd seen you and Mr. Markham she changed: she became weak and . . . oh, something terrible seemed to be preying on her mind. After I'd put her to bed she kept repeating in an awful whisper: 'Johnny Sprig, Johnny Sprig.' . . . I phoned her doctor and he came right over. He said she had to be kept very quiet. . . ."

"It's of no importance," Vance assured her. "Of

course we shall wait.—Who is her doctor, Miss Dillard?"

"Whitney Barstead. He's attended her as long as I can remember."

"A good man," nodded Vance. "There's no better neurologist in the country. We'll do nothing without his permission."

Miss Dillard gave him a grateful look. Then she excused herself.

When we were again in the drawing-room Arnesson stationed himself before the fireplace and regarded Vance satirically.

"'Johnny Sprig, Johnny Sprig.' Ha! Lady Mae got the idea at once. She may be cracked, but certain lobes of her brain are over-active. Unaccountable piece of machinery, the human brain. Some of the greatest mental computers of Europe are morons. And I know a couple of chess masters who need nurses to dress and feed 'em."

Vance appeared not to hear him. He had stopped by a small cabinet near the archway and was apparently absorbed in a set of jade carvings of ancient Chinese origin.

"That elephant doesn't belong there," he remarked casually, pointing to a tiny figure in the collection. "It's a *bunjinga*—decadent, don't y' know. Clever, but not authentic. Probably a copy of a Manchu piece." He stifled a yawn and turned toward Markham. "I say, old man, there's nothing more we can do. Suppose we toddle. We might have a brief word with the professor before we go, though. . . . Mind waiting for us here, Mr. Arnesson?"

Arnesson lifted his eyebrows in some surprise, but

immediately crinkled his face into a disdainful smile.

"Oh, no. Go ahead." And he began refilling his pipe.

Professor Dillard was much annoyed at our second intrusion.

"We've just learned," said Markham, "that you were speaking to Mrs. Drukker before breakfast this morning. . . ."

The muscles of Professor Dillard's cheeks worked angrily.

"Is it any concern of the District Attorney's office if I speak to a neighbor in my garden?"

"Certainly not, sir. But I am in the midst of an investigation which seriously concerns your house, and I assumed that I had the privilege of seeking help from you."

The old man spluttered a moment.

"Very well," he acquiesced irritably. "I saw no one except Mrs. Drukker—if that's what you're after."

Vance projected himself into the conversation.

"That's not what we came to you for, Professor Dillard. We wanted merely to ask you if Mrs. Drukker gave you the impression this morning that she suspected what had taken place earlier in Riverside Park."

The professor was about to make a sharp retort, but checked himself. After a moment he said simply:

"No, she gave me no such impression."

"Did she appear in any way uneasy or, let us say, excited?"

"She did not!" Professor Dillard rose and faced Markham. "I understand perfectly what you are

driving at; and I won't have it. I've told you, Markham, that I'll take no part in spying or tale-bearing where this unhappy woman is concerned. That's all I have to say to you." He turned back to his desk. "I regret I'm very busy to-day."

We descended to the main floor and made our adieus to Arnesson. He waved his hand to us cordially as we went out; but his smile held something of contemptuous patronage, as if he had witnessed, and was gloating over, the rebuff we had just received.

When we were on the sidewalk Vance paused to light a fresh cigarette.

"Now for a brief *causerie* with the sad and gentlemanly Mr. Pardee. I don't know what he can tell us, but I have a yearnin' to commune with him."

Pardee, however, was not at home. His Japanese servant informed us that his master was most likely at the Manhattan Chess Club.

"To-morrow will be time enough," Vance said to Markham, as we turned away from the house. "I'll get in touch with Doctor Barstead in the morning and try to arrange to see Mrs. Drukker. We'll include Pardee in the same pilgrimage."

"I sure hope," grumbled Heath, "that we learn more to-morrow than we did to-day."

"You overlook one or two consolin' windfalls, Sergeant," returned Vance. "We've found out that every one connected with the Dillard house was acquainted with Sprigg and could easily have known of his early morning walks along the Hudson. We've also learned that the professor and Mrs. Drukker were ramblin' in the garden at eight o'clock this morning. And we discovered that a .32 revolver has

disappeared from the archery-room.—Not an embarrassment of riches, but something—oh, decidedly something."

As we drove down-town Markham roused himself from gloomy abstraction, and looked apprehensively at Vance.

"I'm almost afraid to go on with this case. It's becoming too sinister. And if the newspapers get hold of that Johnny-Sprig nursery rhyme and connect the two murders, I hate to think of the gaudy sensation that'll follow."

"I fear you're in for it, old man," sighed Vance. "I'm not a bit psychic—never had dreams that came true, and don't know what a telepathic seizure feels like—but something tells me that the Bishop is going to acquaint the press with that bit of Mother-Goose verse. The point of his new joke is even obscurer than his Cock-Robin comedy. He'll see to it that no one misses it. Even a grim humorist who uses corpses for his cap-and-bells must have his audience. Therein lies the one weakness of his abominable crimes. It's about our only hope, Markham."

"I'll give Quinan a ring," said Heath, "and find out if anything has been received."

But the Sergeant was saved the trouble. The *World* reporter was waiting for us at the District Attorney's office, and Swacker ushered him in at once.

"Howdy, Mr. Markham." There was a breezy impudence in Quinan's manner, but withal he showed signs of nervous excitement. "I've got something here for Sergeant Heath. They told me at Headquarters that he was handling the Sprigg case, and said he was parleying with you. So I blew over."

He reached in his pocket and, taking out a sheet of paper, handed it to Heath. "I'm being mighty high, wide and handsome with you, Sergeant, and I expect a little inside stuff by way of reciprocity. . . . Cast your eye on that document. Just received by America's foremost family journal."

It was a plain piece of typewriting paper, and it contained the Mother-Goose melody of Johnny Sprig, typed in élite characters with a pale-blue ribbon. In the lower right-hand corner was the signature in capitals: THE BISHOP.

"And here's the envelope, Sergeant." Quinan again dug down into his pocket.

The official cancellation bore the hour of 9 a. m., and, like the first note, it had been mailed in the district of Post Office Station "N."

CHAPTER XII

A MIDNIGHT CALL

(Tuesday, April 12; 10 a. m.)

The following morning the front pages of the metropolitan press carried sensational stories which surpassed Markham's worst fears. In addition to the *World* two other leading morning journals had received notes similar to the one shown us by Quinan; and the excitement created by their publication was tremendous. The entire city was thrown into a state of apprehension and fear; and though half-hearted attempts were made here and there to dismiss the maniacal aspect of the crimes on the ground of coincidence, and to explain away the Bishop notes as the work of a practical joker, all the newspapers and the great majority of the public were thoroughly convinced that a new and terrible type of killer was preying upon the community.*

Markham and Heath were beset by reporters, but a veil of secrecy was sedulously maintained. No intimation was given that there was any reason to believe that the solution lay close to the Dillard household; and no mention was made of the missing .32 revolver. Sperling's status was sympathetically dealt

* A similar state of panic obtained in London in 1888 when Jack-the-Ripper was engaged in his grisly, abnormal debauch; and again in Hanover in 1923 when Haarmann, the werwolf, was busy with his anthropophagous slaughters. But I can recall no other modern parallel for the atmosphere of gruesome horror that settled over New York during the Bishop murders.

with by the press. The general attitude now was that the young man had been the unfortunate victim of circumstances; and all criticism of Markham's procrastination in prosecuting him was instantly dropped.

On the day that Sprigg was shot Markham called a conference at the Stuyvesant Club. Both Inspector Moran of the Detective Bureau and Chief Inspector O'Brien* attended. The two murders were gone over in detail, and Vance outlined his reasons for believing that the answer to the problem would eventually be found either in the Dillard house or in some quarter directly connected with it.

"We are now in touch," he ended, "with every person who could possibly have had sufficient knowledge of the conditions surrounding the two victims to perpetrate the crimes successfully; and our only course is to concentrate on these persons."

Inspector Moran was inclined to agree. "Except," he qualified, "that none of the *dramatis personæ* you have mentioned strikes me as a bloodthirsty maniac."

"The murderer is not a maniac in the conventional sense," returned Vance. "He's probably normal on all other points. His brain, in fact, may be brilliant except for this one lesion—too brilliant, I should say. He has lost all sense of proportion through sheer exalted speculation."

"But does even a perverted superman indulge in such hideous jests without a motive?" asked the Inspector.

*Chief Inspector O'Brien was then in command of the entire Police Department.

"Ah, but there is a motive. Some tremendous impetus is back of the monstrous conception of these murders—an impetus which, in its operative results, takes the form of satanic humor."

O'Brien took no part in this discussion. Though impressed by its vague implications, he became nettled by its impractical character.

"That sort of talk," he rumbled ponderously, "is all right for newspaper editorials, but it ain't workable." He shook his fat black cigar at Markham. "What we gotta do is to run down every lead and get some kind of legal evidence."

It was finally decided that the Bishop notes were to be turned over to an expert analyst, and an effort made to trace both the typewriter and the stationery. A systematic search was to be instituted for witnesses who might have seen some one in Riverside Park between seven and eight that morning. Sprigg's habits and associations were to be the subject of a careful report; and a man was to be detailed to question the mail collector of the district in the hope that, when taking the letters from the various boxes, he had noticed the envelopes addressed to the papers and could say in which box they had actually been posted.

Various other purely routine activities were outlined; and Moran suggested that for a time three men be stationed day and night in the vicinity of the murders to watch for any possible developments or for suspicious actions on the part of those involved. The Police Department and the District Attorney's office were to work hand in hand. Markham, of course, in tacit agreement with Heath, assumed command.

"I have already interviewed the members of the Dillard and Drukker homes in connection with the Robin murder," Markham explained to Moran and O'Brien: "and I've talked the Sprigg case over with Professor Dillard and Arnesson. To-morrow I shall see Pardee and the Drukkers."

The next morning Markham, accompanied by Heath, called for Vance a little before ten o'clock.

"This thing can't go on," he declared, after the meagrest of greetings. "If any one knows anything, we've got to find it out. I'm going to put the screws on—and damn the consequences!"

"By all means, chivy 'em." Vance himself appeared despondent. "I doubt if it'll help though. No ordin'ry procedure is going to solve this riddle. However, I've phoned Barstead. He says we may talk with Mrs. Drukker this morning. But I've arranged to see him first. I have a hankerin' to know more of the Drukker pathology. Hunchbacks, d' ye see, are not usually produced by falls."

We drove at once to the doctor's home and were received without delay. Doctor Barstead was a large comfortable man, whose pleasantness of manner impressed me as being the result of schooled effort.

Vance went straight to the point.

"We have reason to believe, doctor, that Mrs. Drukker and perhaps her son are indirectly concerned in the recent death of Mr. Robin at the Dillard house; and before we question either of them further we should like to have you tell us—as far as professional etiquette will permit—something of the neurological situation we are facing."

"Please be more explicit, sir." Doctor Barstead spoke with defensive aloofness.

"I am told," Vance continued, "that Mrs. Drukker regards herself as responsible for her son's kyphosis; but it is my understanding that such malformations as his do not ordinarily result from mere physical injuries."

Doctor Barstead nodded his head slowly.

"That is quite true. Compression paraplegia of the spinal cord may follow a dislocation or injury, but the lesion thus produced is of the focal transverse type. Osteitis or caries of the vertebræ—what we commonly call Pott's disease—is usually of tubercular origin; and this tuberculosis of the spine occurs most frequently in children. Often it exists at birth. True, an injury may precede the onset by determining the site of infection or exciting a latent focus; and this fact no doubt gives rise to the belief that the injury itself produces the disease. But both Schmaus and Horsley have exposed the true pathological anatomy of spinal caries. Drukker's deformity is unquestionably of tubercular origin. Even his curvature is of the marked rounded type, denoting an extensive involvement of vertebræ; and there is no scholiosis whatever. Moreover, he has all the local symptoms of osteitis."

"You have, of course, explained the situation to Mrs. Drukker."

"On many occasions. But I have had no success. The fact is, a terrific instinct of perverted martyrdom bids her cling to the notion that she is responsible for her son's condition. This erroneous idea has become an *idée fixe* with her. It constitutes her entire mental outlook, and gives meaning to the life of service and sacrifice she had lived for forty years."

"To what extent," asked Vance, "would you say this psychoneurosis has affected her mind?"

"That would be difficult to say; and it is not a question I would care to discuss. I may say this, however: she is undoubtedly morbid; and her values have become distorted. At times there have been—I tell you this in strictest confidence—signs of marked hallucinosis centring upon her son. His welfare has become an obsession with her. There is practically nothing she would not do for him."

"We appreciate your confidence, doctor. . . . And would it not be logical to assume that her upset condition yesterday resulted from some fear or shock connected with his welfare?"

"Undoubtedly. She has no emotional or mental life outside of him. But whether her temporary collapse was due to a real or imaginary fear, one cannot say. She has lived too long on the borderland between reality and fantasy."

There was a short silence, and then Vance asked:

"As to Drukker himself: would you regard him as wholly responsible for his acts?"

"Since he is my patient," returned Doctor Barstead, with frigid reproach, "and since I have taken no steps to sequester him, I consider your question an impertinence."

Markham leaned over and spoke peremptorily.

"We haven't time to mince words, doctor. We're investigating a series of atrocious murders. Mr. Drukker is involved in those murders—to what extent we don't know. But it is our duty to find out."

The doctor's first impulse was to combat Mark-

ham; but he evidently thought better of it, for when he answered, it was in an indulgently matter-of-fact voice.

"I have no reason, sir, to withhold any information from you. But to question Mr. Drukker's responsibility is to impute negligence to me in the matter of public safety. Perhaps, however, I misunderstand this gentleman's question." He studied Vance for a brief moment. "There are, of course, degrees of responsibility," he went on, in a professional tone. "Mr. Drukker's mind is overdeveloped, as is often the case with kyphotic victims. All mental processes are turned inward, as it were; and the lack of normal physical reactions often tends to produce inhibitions and aberrancies. But I've noted no indications of this condition in Mr. Drukker. He is excitable and prone to hysteria; but, then, psychokinesia is a common accompaniment of his disease."

"What form do his recreations take?" Vance was politely casual.

Doctor Barstead thought a moment.

"Children's games, I should say. Such recreations are not unusual with cripples. In Mr. Drukker's case it is what we might term a waking wish-fulfilment. Having had no normal childhood, he grasps at whatever will give him a sense of youthful rehabilitation. His juvenile activities tend to balance the monotony of his purely mental life."

"What is Mrs. Drukker's attitude toward his instinct for play?"

"She very correctly encourages it. I've often seen her leaning over the wall above the playground in Riverside Park watching him. And she always pre-

sides at the children's parties and dinners which he holds in his home."

We took our leave a few minutes later. As we turned into 76th Street, Heath, as if arousing himself from a bad dream, drew a deep breath and sat upright in the car.

"Did you get that about the kid games?" he asked, in an awe-stricken voice. "Good God, Mr. Vance! What's this case going to turn into?"

A curious sadness was in Vance's eyes as he gazed ahead toward the misty Jersey cliffs across the river.

Our ring at the Drukker house was answered by a portly German woman, who planted herself stolidly before us and informed us suspiciously that Mr. Drukker was too busy to see any one.

"You'd better tell him, however," said Vance, "that the District Attorney wishes to speak to him immediately."

His words produced a strange effect on the woman. Her hands went to her face, and her massive bosom rose and fell convulsively. Then, as though panic-stricken, she turned and ascended the stairs. We heard her knock on a door; there was a sound of voices; and a few moments later she came back to inform us that Mr. Drukker would see us in his study.

As we passed the woman Vance suddenly turned and, fixing his eyes on her ominously, asked:

"What time did Mr. Drukker get up yesterday morning?"

"I—don't know," she stammered, thoroughly frightened. "*Ja, ja,* I know. At nine o'clock—like always."

Vance nodded and moved on.

Drukker received us standing by a large table covered with books and sheets of manuscript. He bowed sombrely, but did not ask us to have chairs.

Vance studied him a moment as if trying to read the secret that lay behind his restless, hollow eyes.

"Mr. Drukker," he began, "it is not our desire to cause you unnecess'ry trouble; but we have learned that you were acquainted with Mr. John Sprigg, who, as you probably know, was shot near here yesterday morning. Now, could you suggest any reason that any one might have had for killing him?"

Drukker drew himself up. Despite his effort at self-control there was a slight tremor in his voice as he answered.

"I knew Mr. Sprigg but slightly. I can suggest nothing whatever in regard to his death. . . ."

"There was found on his body a piece of paper bearing the Riemann-Christoffel tensor which you introduce in your book in the chapter on the finiteness of physical space." As Vance spoke he moved one of the typewritten sheets of papers on the table toward him, and glanced at it casually.

Drukker seemed not to notice the action. The information contained in Vance's words had rivetted his attention.

"I can't understand it," he said vaguely. "May I see the notation?"

Markham complied at once with his request. After studying the paper a moment Drukker handed it back; and his little eyes narrowed malevolently.

"Have you asked Arnesson about this? He was discussing this very subject with Sprigg last week."

"Oh, yes," Vance told him carelessly. Mr. Arnesson recalled the incident, but couldn't throw any light on it. We thought perhaps you could succeed where he had failed."

"I regret I can't accommodate you." There was the suggestion of a sneer in Drukker's reply. "Any one might use the tensor. Weyl's and Einstein's works are full of it. It isn't copyrighted. . . ." He leaned over a revolving book case and drew out a thin octavo pamphlet. Here it is in Minkowski's 'Relativitätsprinzip,' only with different symbols—a T for the B, for instance; and Greek letters for the indices." He reached for another volume. "Poincaré also uses it in his 'Hypothèses Cosmogoniques,' with still other symbolic equivalents." He tossed the books on the table contemptuously. "Why come to me about it?"

"It wasn't the tensor formula alone that led our roving footsteps to your door," said Vance lightly. "For instance, we have reason to believe that Sprigg's death is connected with Robin's murder. . . ."

Drukker's long hands caught the edge of the table, and he leaned forward, his eyes glittering excitedly.

"Connected—Sprigg and Robin? You don't believe that newspaper talk, do you? . . . It's a damned lie!" His face had begun to twitch, and his voice rose shrilly. "It's insane nonsense. . . . There's no proof, I tell you—not a shred of proof!"

"Cock Robin and Johnny Sprig, don't y' know," came Vance's soft insistent voice.

"That rot! That crazy rot!—Oh, good God! Has the world gone mad! . . ." He swayed back and

forth as he beat on the table with one hand, sending the papers flying in all directions.

Vance looked at him with mild surprise.

"Aren't you acquainted with the Bishop, Mr. Drukker?"

The man stopped swaying and, steadying himself, stared at Vance with terrible intensity. His mouth was drawn back at the corners, resembling the transverse laugh of progressive muscular dystrophy.

"You, too! You've gone mad!" He swept his eyes over us. "You damned, unutterable fools! There's no such person as the Bishop! There wasn't any such person as Cock Robin or Johnny Sprig. And here you are—men grown—trying to frighten me—*me*, a mathematician—with nursery tales! . . ." He began to laugh hysterically.

Vance went to him quickly, and taking his arm led him to his chair. Slowly his laughter died away, and he waved his hand wearily.

"Too bad Robin and Sprigg were killed." His tone was heavy and colorless. "But children are the only persons that matter. . . . You'll probably find the murderer. If you don't, maybe I'll help you. But don't let your imaginations run away with you. Keep to facts . . . facts. . . ."

The man was exhausted, and we left him.

"He's scared, Markham—deuced scared," observed Vance, when we were again in the hall. "I could bear to know what is hidden in that shrewd warped mind of his."

He led the way down the hall to Mrs. Drukker's door.

"This method of visiting a lady doesn't accord

with the best social usage. Really, y' know, Markham, I wasn't born to be a policeman. I abhor snooping."

Our knock was answered by a feeble voice. Mrs. Drukker, paler than usual, was lying back on her chaise-longue by the window. Her white prehensile hands lay along the arms of the chair, slightly flexed; and more than ever she recalled to my mind the pictures I had seen of the ravening Harpies that tormented Phineus in the story of the Argonauts.

Before we could speak she said in a strained terrified voice: "I knew you would come—I knew you were not through torturing me. . . ."

"To torture you, Mrs. Drukker," returned Vance softly, "is the furthest thing from our thoughts. We merely want your help."

Vance's manner appeared to alleviate her terror somewhat, and she studied him calculatingly.

"If only I could help you!" she muttered. "But there's nothing to be done—nothing. . . ."

"You might tell us what you saw from your window on the day of Mr. Robin's death," Vance suggested kindly.

"No—no!" Her eyes stared horribly. "I saw nothing—I wasn't near the window that morning. You may kill me, but my dying words would be No—no—*no!*"

Vance did not press the point.

"Beedle tells us," he went on, "that you often rise early and walk in the garden."

"Oh, yes." The words came with a sigh of relief. "I don't sleep well in the mornings. I often wake up with dull boring pains in my spine, and the

muscles of my back feel rigid and sore. So I get up and walk in the yard whenever the weather is mild enough."

"Beedle saw you in the garden yesterday morning."

The woman nodded absently.

"And she also saw Professor Dillard with you."

Again she nodded, but immediately afterward she shot Vance a combative inquisitive glance.

"He sometimes joins me," she hastened to explain. "He feels sorry for me, and he admires Adolph; he thinks he's a great genius. And he *is* a genius! He'd be a great man—as great as Professor Dillard—if it hadn't been for his illness. . . . And it was all my fault. I let him fall when he was a baby. . . ." A dry sob shook her emaciated body, and her fingers worked spasmodically.

After a moment Vance asked: "What did you and Professor Dillard talk about in the garden yesterday?"

A sudden wiliness crept into the woman's manner.

"About Adolph mostly," she said, with a too obvious attempt at unconcern.

"Did you see any one else in the yard or on the archery range?" Vance's indolent eyes were on the woman.

"No!" Again a sense of fear pervaded her. "But somebody else was there, wasn't there?—somebody who didn't wish to be seen." She nodded her head eagerly. "Yes! Some one else was there—and they thought I saw them. . . . But I didn't! Oh, merciful God, I didn't! . . ." She covered her face with her hands, and her body shook convulsively. "If only

I had seen them! If only I knew! But it wasn't Adolph—it wasn't my little boy. He was asleep—thank God, he was asleep!"

Vance went close to the woman.

"Why do you thank God that it wasn't your son?" he asked gently.

She looked up with some amazement.

"Why, don't you remember? A little man shot Johnny Sprig with a little gun yesterday morning—the same little man that killed Cock Robin with a bow and arrow. It's all a horrible game—and I'm *afraid*. . . . But I mustn't tell—I *can't* tell. The little man might do something awful. Maybe"—her voice became dull with horror—"maybe he has some insane idea that I'm *the old woman who lived in a shoe!* . . ."

"Come, come, Mrs. Drukker." Vance forced a consoling smile. "Such talk is nonsense. You've let these matters prey on your mind. There's a perfectly rational explanation for everything. And I have a feeling that you yourself can help us find that explanation."

"No—no! I can't—I mustn't! I don't understand it myself." She took a deep, resolute inspiration, and compressed her lips.

"Why can't you tell us?" persisted Vance.

"Because I don't know," she cried. "I wish to God I did! I only know that something horrible is going on here—that some awful curse is hanging over this house. . . ."

"How do you know that?"

The woman began to tremble violently, and her eyes roamed distractedly about the room.

"Because"—her voice was barely audible—"because the little man came here last night!"

A chill passed up my spine at this statement, and I heard even the imperturbable Sergeant's sharp intake of breath. Then Vance's calm voice sounded.

"How do you know he was here, Mrs. Drukker? Did you see him?"

"No, I didn't see him; but he tried to get into this room—by that door." She pointed unsteadily toward the entrance to the hallway through which we had just come.

"You must tell us about it," said Vance; "or we will be driven to conclude that you manufactured the story."

"Oh, but I didn't manufacture it—may God be my witness!" There could be no doubt whatever of the woman's sincerity. Something had occurred which filled her with mortal fear. "I was lying in bed, awake. The little clock on the mantel had just struck midnight; and I heard a soft rustling sound in the hall outside. I turned my head toward the door—there was a dim night-light burning on the table here . . . and then I saw the door-knob turn slowly—silently—as if some one were trying to get in without waking me——"

"Just a moment, Mrs. Drukker," interrupted Vance. "Do you always lock your door at night?"

"I've never locked it until recently—after Mr. Robin's death. I've somehow felt insecure since then—I can't explain why. . . ."

"I quite understand.—Please go on with the story. You say you saw the door-knob move. And then?"

"Yes—yes. It moved softly—back and forth. I

lay there in bed, frozen with terror. But after a while I managed to call out—I don't know how loud; but suddenly the door-knob ceased to turn, and I heard footsteps moving rapidly away—down the hall. . . . Then I managed to get up. I went to the door and listened. I was afraid—afraid for Adolph. And I could hear those soft footsteps descending the stairs——"

"Which stairs?"

"At the rear—leading to the kitchen. . . . Then the door of the screen porch shut, and everything was silent again. . . . I knelt with my ear to the key-hole a long time, listening, waiting. But nothing happened, and at last I rose. . . . Something seemed to tell me I must open the door. I was in deadly terror—and yet I knew I had to open the door. . . ." A shudder swept her body. "Softly I turned the key, and took hold of the knob. As I pulled the door slowly inward, a tiny object that had been poised on the outside knob fell to the floor with a clatter. There was a light burning in the hall—I always keep one burning at night,—and I tried not to look down. I tried—I *tried* . . . but I couldn't keep my eyes away from the floor. And there at my feet—oh, God in Heaven!—there lay *something!* . . ."

She was unable to go on. Horror seemed to paralyze her tongue. Vance's cool, unemotional voice, however, steadied her.

"What was it that lay on the floor, Mrs. Drukker?"

With difficulty the woman rose and, bracing herself for a moment at the foot of the bed, went to the dressing-table. Pulling out a small drawer she

reached inside and fumbled among its contents. Then she extended her open hand to us. On the palm lay a small chessman—ebony black against the whiteness of her skin. It was the bishop!

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE BISHOP'S SHADOW

(Tuesday, April 12; 11 a. m.)

Vance took the bishop from Mrs. Drukker and slipped it into his coat pocket.

"It would be dangerous, madam," he said, with impressive solemnity, "if what happened here last night became known. Should the person who played this joke on you find out that you had informed the police, other attempts to frighten you might be made. Therefore, not one word of what you have told us must pass your lips."

"May I not even tell Adolph?" the woman asked distractedly.

"No one! You must maintain a complete silence, even in the presence of your son."

I could not understand Vance's emphasis on this point; but before many days had passed it was all too clear to me. The reason for his advice was revealed with tragic force; and I realized that even at the time of Mrs. Drukker's disclosure his penetrating mind had worked out an uncannily accurate ratiocination, and foreseen certain possibilities unsuspected by the rest of us.

We took our leave a few moments later, and descended the rear stairs. The staircase made a sharp turn to the right at a landing eight or ten steps below the second floor, and led into a small dark passageway with two doors—one on the left, opening

into the kitchen, and another, diagonally opposite, giving on the screen porch.

We stepped out immediately to the porch, now flooded in sunshine, and stood without a word trying to shake off the atmosphere cast about us by Mrs. Drukker's terrifying experience.

Markham was the first to speak.

"Do you believe, Vance, that the person who brought that chessman here last night is the killer of Robin and Sprigg?"

"There can be no doubt of it. The purpose of his midnight visit is hideously clear. It fits perfectly with what has already come to light."

"It strikes me merely as a ruthless practical joke," Markham rejoined, "—the act of a drunken fiend."

Vance shook his head.

"It's the only thing in this whole nightmare that doesn't qualify as a piece of insane humor. It was a deadly serious excursion. The devil himself is never so solemn as when covering his tracks. Our particular devil's hand had been forced, and he made a bold play. 'Pon my soul, I almost prefer his jovial mood to the one that prompted him to break in here last night. However, we now have something definite to go on."

Heath, impatient of all theorizing, quickly picked up this last remark.

"And what might that be, sir?"

"*Imprimis*, we may assume that our chess-playing troubadour was thoroughly familiar with the plan of this house. The night-light in the upper hall may have cast its gleam down the rear stairs as far as the landing, but the rest of the way must have been in

darkness. Moreover, the arrangement of the rear of the house is somewhat complicated. Therefore, unless he knew the layout he couldn't have found his way about noiselessly in the dark. Obviously, too, the visitor knew in which room Mrs. Drukker slept. Also, he must have known what time Drukker turned in last night, for he wouldn't have chanced making his call unless he had felt sure that the coast was clear."

"That don't help us much," grumbled Heath. "We've been going on the theory right along that the murderer was wise to everything connected with these two houses."

"True. But one may be fairly intimate with a family and still not know at what hour each of its members retires on a certain night, or just how to effect a surreptitious entry to the house. Furthermore, Sergeant, our midnight caller was some one who knew that Mrs. Drukker was in the habit of leaving her door unlocked at night; for he had every intention of entering her room. His object wasn't merely to leave his little memento outside and then depart. The silent stealthy way he tried the knob proves that."

"He may simply have wanted to waken Mrs. Drukker so she would find it at once," suggested Markham.

"Then why did he turn the knob so carefully—as if trying *not* to waken any one? A rattling of the knob, or a soft tapping, or even throwing the chessman against the door, would have answered that purpose much better. . . . No, Markham; he had a far more sinister object in mind; but when he found him-

self thwarted by the locked door and heard Mrs. Drukker's cry of fright, he placed the bishop where she would find it, and fled."

"Still and all, sir," argued Heath, "any one mighta known she left her door unlocked at night; and any one coulda learned the lay of the house so's to find their way around in the dark."

"But who, Sergeant, had a key to the rear door? And who could have used it at midnight last night?"

"The door mighta been left unlocked," countered Heath; "and when we check up on the alibis of everybody we may get a lead."

Vance sighed.

"You'll probably find two or three people without any alibi at all. And if last night's visit here was planned, a convincing alibi may have been prepared. We're not dealing with a simpleton, Sergeant. We're playing a game to the death with a subtle and resourceful murderer, who can think as quickly as we can, and who has had long training in the subtleties of logic. . . ."

As if on a sudden impulse he turned and passed indoors, motioning us to follow. He went straight to the kitchen where the German woman who had admitted us earlier sat stolidly by a table preparing the midday meal. She rose as we entered and backed away from us. Vance, puzzled by her demeanor, studied her for several moments without speaking. Then his eyes drifted to the table where a large eggplant had been halved lengthwise and scooped out.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, glancing at the contents of the various dishes standing about. "*Aubergines à la Turque*, what? An excellent dish. But I'd mince

the mutton a bit finer, if I were you. And not too much cheese: it detracts from the sauce *espagnole* which I see you're preparing." He looked up with a pleasant smile. "What's your name, by the by?"

His manner astonished the woman greatly, but it also had the effect of alleviating her fears.

"Menzel," she answered in a dull voice. "Grete Menzel."

"And how long have you been with the Drukkers?"

"Going on twenty-five years."

"A long time," Vance commented musingly. "Tell me: why were you frightened when we called here this morning?"

The woman became sullen, and her large hands closed tightly.

"I wasn't frightened. But Mr. Drukker was busy——"

"You thought perhaps we had come to arrest him," Vance broke in.

Her eyes dilated, but she made no answer.

"What time did Mr. Drukker rise yesterday morning?" Vance went on.

"I told you . . . nine o'clock—like always."

"What time did Mr. Drukker rise?" The insistent, detached quality of his voice was far more ominous than any dramatic intonation could have been.

"I told you——"

"*Die Wahrheit, Frau Menzel! Um wie viel Uhr ist er aufgestanden?*"

The psychological effect of this repetition of the question in German was instantaneous. The woman's hands went to her face, and a stifled cry, like a trapped animal's, escaped her.

"I don't—know," she groaned. "I called him at half past eight, but he didn't answer, and I tried the door. . . . It wasn't locked and—*Du lieber Gott!*—he was gone."

"When did you next see him?" asked Vance quietly.

"At nine. I went up-stairs again to tell him breakfast was ready. He was in the study—at his desk—working like mad, and all excited. He told me to go away."

"Did he come down to breakfast?"

"*Ja—ja.* He came down—half an hour later."

The woman leaned heavily against the drain-board of the sink, and Vance drew up a chair for her.

"Sit down, Mrs. Menzel," he said kindly. When she had obeyed, he asked: "Why did you tell me this morning that Mr. Drukker rose at nine?"

"I had to—I was told to." Her resistance was gone, and she breathed heavily like a person exhausted. "When Mrs. Drukker came back from Miss Dillard's yesterday afternoon she told me that if any one asked me that question about Mr. Drukker I was to say 'Nine o'clock.' She made me swear I'd say it. . . ." Her voice trailed off, and her eyes took on a glassy stare. "I was afraid to say anything else."

Vance still seemed puzzled. After several deep inhalations on his cigarette he remarked:

"There's nothing in what you've told us to affect you this way. It's not unnatural that a morbid woman like Mrs. Drukker should have taken such a fantastic measure to protect her son from possible suspicion, when a murder had been committed in the neighborhood. You've surely been with her long

enough to realize how she might exaggerate every remote possibility where her son is concerned. In fact, I'm surprised you take it so seriously. . . . Have you any other reason to connect Mr. Drukker with this crime?"

"No—no!" The woman shook her head distractedly.

Vance strolled to the rear window, frowning. Suddenly he swung about. He had become stern and implacable.

"Where were you, Mrs. Menzel, the morning Mr. Robin was killed?"

An astounding change came over the woman. Her face paled; her lips trembled; and she clinched her hands with a spasmodic gesture. She tried to take her staring eyes from Vance, but some quality in his gaze held her.

"Where were you, Mrs. Menzel?" The question was repeated sharply.

"I was—here——" she began; then stopped abruptly and cast an agitated glance at Heath, who was watching her fixedly.

"You were in the kitchen?"

She nodded. The power of speech seemed to have deserted her.

"And you saw Mr. Drukker return from the Dillards'?"

Again she nodded.

"Exactly," said Vance. "And he came in the rear way, by the screen porch, and went up-stairs. . . . And he didn't know that you saw him through the kitchen door. . . . And later he inquired regarding your whereabouts at that hour. . . . And when you

told him you had been in the kitchen he warned you to keep silent about it. . . . And then you learned of Mr. Robin's death a few minutes before you saw him enter here. . . . And yesterday, when Mrs. Drukker told you to say he had not risen until nine, and you heard that some one else had been killed near here, you became suspicious and frightened. . . . That's correct, is it not, Mrs. Menzel?"

The woman was sobbing audibly in her apron. There was no need for her to reply, for it was obvious that Vance had guessed the truth.

Heath took his cigar from his mouth and glared at her ferociously.

"So! You were holding out on me," he bellowed, thrusting forward his jaw. "You lied to me when I questioned you the other day. Obstructing justice, were you?"

She gave Vance a look of frightened appeal.

"Mrs. Menzel, Sergeant," he said, "had no intention of obstructing justice. And now that she has told us the truth, I think we may overlook her perfectly natural deception in the matter." Then before Heath had time to reply he turned to the woman and asked in a matter-of-fact tone: "Do you lock the door leading to the screen porch every night?"

"*Ja*—every night." She spoke listlessly: the reaction from her fright had left her apathetic.

"You are sure you locked it last night?"

"At half past nine—when I went to bed."

Vance stepped across the little passageway and inspected the lock.

"It's a snap-lock," he observed, on returning. "Who has a key to the door?"

"I have a key. And Mrs. Drukker—she has one, too."

"You're sure no one else has a key?"

"No one except Miss Dillard. . . ."

"Miss Dillard?" Vance's voice was suddenly resonant with interest. "Why should she have one?"

"She's had it for years. She's like a member of the family—over here two and three times a day. When I go out I lock the back door; and her having a key saves Mrs. Drukker the trouble of coming down and letting her in."

"Quite natural," Vance murmured. Then: "We sha'n't bother you any more, Mrs. Menzel." He strolled out on the little rear porch.

When the door had been closed behind us he pointed to the screen door that opened into the yard.

"You'll note that this wire mesh has been forced away from the frame, permitting one to reach inside and turn the latch. Either Mrs. Drukker's key or Miss Dillard's—probably the latter—was used to open the door of the house."

Heath nodded: this tangible aspect of the case appealed to him. But Markham was not paying attention. He stood in the background smoking with angry detachment. Presently he turned resolutely and was about to re-enter the house when Vance caught his arm.

"No—no, Markham! That would be abominable technique. Curb your ire. You're so dashed impulsive, don't y' know."

"But, damn it, Vance!" Markham shook off the other's hand. "Drukker lied to us about going out the Dillard gate before Robin's murder——"

"Of course he did. I've suspected all along that the account he gave us of his movements that morning was a bit fanciful. But it's useless to go upstairs now and hector him about it. He'll simply say that the cook is mistaken."

Markham was unconvinced.

"But what about yesterday morning? I want to know where he was when the cook called him at half past eight. Why should Mrs. Drukker be so anxious to have us believe he was asleep?"

"She, too, probably went to his room and saw that he was gone. Then when she heard of Sprigg's death her febrile imagination became overheated, and she proceeded to invest him with an alibi. But you're only inviting trouble when you plan to chivy him about the discrepancies in his tale."

"I'm not so sure." Markham spoke with significative gravity. "I may be inviting a solution to this hideous business."

Vance did not reply at once. He stood gazing down at the quivering shadows cast on the lawn by the willow trees. At length he said in a low voice:

"We can't afford to take that chance. If what you're thinking should prove to be true, and you should reveal the information you've just received, the little man who was here last night might prowl about the upper hall again. And this time he might not be content to leave his chessman *outside the door!*"

A look of horror came into Markham's eyes.

"You think I might be jeopardizing the cook's safety if I used her evidence against him at this time?"

"The terrible thing about this affair is that, until we know the truth, we face danger at every turn." Vance's voice was heavy with discouragement. "We can't risk exposing any one. . . ."

The door leading to the porch opened, and Drukker appeared on the threshold, his little eyes blinking in the sunlight. His gaze came to rest on Markham, and a crafty, repulsive smile contorted his mouth.

"I trust I am not disturbing you," he apologized, with a menacing squint; "but the cook has just informed me that she told you she saw me enter here by the rear door on the morning of Mr. Robin's unfortunate death."

"Oh, my aunt!" murmured Vance, turning away and busying himself with the selection of a fresh cigarette. "That tears it."

Drukker shot him an inquisitive look, and drew himself up with a kind of cynical fortitude.

"And what about it, Mr. Drukker?" demanded Markham.

"I merely desired to assure you," the man replied, "that the cook is in error. She has obviously confused the date,—you see, I come and go so often by this rear door. On the morning of Mr. Robin's death, as I explained to you, I left the range by the 75th-Street gate and, after a brief walk in the park, returned home by the front way. I have convinced Grete that she is mistaken."

Vance had been listening to him closely. Now he turned and met the other's smile with a look of bland ingenuousness.

"Did you convince her with a chessman, by any chance?"

Drukker jerked his head forward and sucked in a rasping breath. His twisted frame became taut; the muscles about his eyes and mouth began to twitch; and the ligaments of his neck stood out like whipcord. For a moment I thought he was going to lose his self-control; but with a great effort he steadied himself.

"I don't understand you, sir." There was the vibrancy of an intense anger in his words. "What has a chessman to do with it?"

"Chessmen have various names," suggested Vance softly.

"Are *you* telling *me* about chess?" A venomous contempt marked Drukker's manner, but he managed to grin. "Various names, certainly. There's the king and queen, the rook, the knight——" He broke off. "*The bishop!* . . ." He lay his head against the casement of the door and began to cackle mirthlessly. "So! That's what you mean? *The bishop!* . . . You're a lot of imbecile children playing a nonsense game."

"We have excellent reason to believe," said Vance, with impressive calmness, "that the game is being played by some one else—with the chess bishop as the principal symbol."

Drukker sobered.

"Don't take my mother's vagaries too seriously," he admonished. "Her imagination often plays tricks on her."

"Ah! And why do you mention your mother in this connection?"

"You've just been talking to her, haven't you? And your comments, I must say, sound very much like some of her harmless hallucinations."

"On the other hand," Vance rejoined mildly, "your mother may have perfectly good grounds for her beliefs."

Drukker's eyes narrowed, and he looked swiftly at Markham.

"Rot!"

"Ah, well," sighed Vance; "we sha'n't debate the point." Then in an altered tone he added: "It might help us though, Mr. Drukker, if we knew where you were between eight and nine yesterday morning."

The man opened his mouth slightly as if to speak, but quickly his lips closed again, and he stood staring calculatingly at Vance. At length he answered in a high-pitched insistent voice.

"I was working—in my study—from six o'clock until half past nine." He paused, but evidently felt that further explanation was desirable. "For several months I've been working on a modification of the ether-string theory to account for the interference of light, which the quantum theory is unable to explain. Dillard told me I couldn't do it";—a fanatical light came into his eyes—"but I awoke early yesterday morning with certain factors of the problem clarified; and I got up and went to my study. . . ."

"So that's where you were." Vance spoke carelessly. "It's of no great importance. Sorry we discommoded you to-day." He beckoned with his head to Markham, and moved toward the screen door. As we stepped upon the range he turned back and, smiling, said almost dulcetly: "Mrs. Menzel is under our protection. It would pain us deeply if anything should happen to her."

Drukker looked after us with a sort of hypnotized fascination.

The moment we were out of hearing Vance moved to Heath's side.

"Sergeant," he said in a troubled voice, "that forthright German *Hausfrau* may have put her head unwittingly in a noose. And—my word!—I'm afraid. You'd better have a good man watch the Drukker house to-night—from the rear, under those willow trees. And tell him to break in at the first scream or call. . . . I'll sleep better if I know there's a plain-clothes angel guarding Frau Menzel's slumbers."

"I get you, sir." Heath's face was grim. "There won't be no chess players worrying her to-night."

CHAPTER XIV

A GAME OF CHESS

(Tuesday, April 12; 11.30 a. m.)

As we walked slowly toward the Dillard house it was decided that immediate inquiries should be made regarding the whereabouts the night before of every person connected in any way with this gruesome drama.

"We must be careful, however, to drop no hint of what befell Mrs. Drukker," warned Vance. "Our midnight bishop-bearer did not intend that we should learn of his call. He believed that the poor lady would be too frightened to tell us."

"I'm inclined to think," objected Markham, "that you're attaching too much importance to the episode."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" Vance stopped short and put both hands on the other's shoulders. "You're much too effete—that's your great shortcomin'. You don't feel—you are no child of nature. The poetry of your soul has run to prose. Now I, on the other hand, give my imagination full sway; and I tell you that the leaving of that bishop at Mrs. Drukker's door was no Hallowe'en prank, but the desperate act of a desperate man. It was meant as a warning."

"You think she knows something?"

"I think she saw Robin's body placed on the range. And I think she saw something else—something she would give her life not to have seen."

In silence we moved on. It was our intention to pass through the wall gate into 75th Street and present ourselves at the Dillards' front door: but as we passed the archery-room the basement door opened, and Belle Dillard confronted us anxiously.

"I saw you coming down the range," she said, with troubled eagerness, addressing her words to Markham. "For over an hour I've been waiting to get in touch with you—phoning your office. . . ." Her manner became agitated. "Something strange has happened. Oh, it may not mean anything . . . but when I came through the archery-room here this morning, intending to call on Lady Mae, some impulse made me go to the tool-chest again and look in the drawer,—it seemed so—so queer that the little revolver should have been stolen. . . . And there it lay—in plain sight—beside the other pistol!" She caught her breath. "Mr. Markham, some one returned it to the drawer last night!"

This information acted electrically on Heath.

"Did you touch it?" he asked excitedly.

"Why—no. . . ."

He brushed past her unceremoniously and, going to the tool-chest, yanked open the drawer. There, beside the larger automatic that we had seen the day before, lay a small pearl-handled .32. The Sergeant's eyes glistened as he ran his pencil through the trigger-guard and lifted it gingerly. He held it to the light and sniffed at the end of the barrel.

"One empty chamber," he announced, with satisfaction. "And it's been shot off recently. . . . This oughta get us somewheres." He wrapped the revolver tenderly in a handkerchief and placed it in his

coat pocket. "I'll get Dubois busy on this for finger-prints; and I'll have Cap Hagedorn* check up on the bullets."

"Really now, Sergeant," said Vance banteringly; "do you imagine that the gentleman we're looking for would wipe a bow and arrow clean and then leave his digital monogram on a revolver?"

"I haven't got your imagination, Mr. Vance," returned Heath surlily. "So I'm going ahead doing the things that oughta be done."

"You're quite right." Vance smiled with good-natured admiration at the other's dogged thoroughness. "Forgive me for trying to damp your zeal."

He turned to Belle Dillard.

"We came here primarily to see the professor and Mr. Arnesson. But there's also a matter we'd like to speak about to you.—We understand you have a key to the rear door of the Drukker house."

She gave him a puzzled nod.

"Yes; I've had one for years. I run back and forth so much; and it saves Lady Mae a lot of bother. . . ."

"Our only interest in the key is that it might have been used by some one who had no right to it."

"But that's impossible. I've never lent it to any one. And I always keep it in my hand-bag."

"Is it generally known you have a key to the Drukkers'?"

"Why—I suppose so." She was obviously per-

*Captain Hagedorn was the fire-arms expert of the New York Police Department. It was he who, in the Benson murder case, gave Vance the data with which to establish the height of the murderer; and who made the examination of the three bullets fired from the old Smith & Wesson revolver in the Greene murder case.

plexed. "I've never made a secret of it. The family certainly know about it."

"And you may perhaps have mentioned or revealed the fact when there were outsiders present?"

"Yes—though I can't recall any specific instance."

"Are you sure you have the key now?"

She gave Vance a startled look, and without a word picked up a small lizard-skin hand-bag which lay on the wicker table. Opening it she felt swiftly in one of its inner compartments.

"Yes!" she announced, with relief. "It's where I always keep it. . . . Why do you ask me about it?"

"It's important that we know who had access to the Drukker house," Vance told her. Then, before she could question him further, he asked: "Could the key possibly have left your possession last night?—that is, could it have been extracted from your bag without your knowledge?"

A look of fright came into her face.

"Oh, what has happened——?" she began; but Vance interrupted her.

"Please, Miss Dillard! There's nothing for you to worry about. We're merely striving to eliminate certain remote possibilities in connection with our investigation.—Tell me: could any one have taken your key last night?"

"No one," she answered uneasily. "I went to the theatre at eight o'clock, and had my bag with me the entire time."

"When did you last make use of the key?"

"After dinner last night. I ran over to see how Lady Mae was and to say good-night."

Vance frowned slightly. I could see that this in-

formation did not square with some theory he had formed.

"You made use of the key after dinner," he recapitulated, "and kept it with you in your hand-bag the rest of the evening, without letting it once go out of your sight.—Is that right, Miss Dillard?"

The girl nodded.

"I even held the bag in my lap during the play," she amplified.

Vance regarded the hand-bag thoughtfully.

"Well," he said lightly, "so ends the romance of the key.—And now we're going to bother your uncle again. Do you think you'd better act as our *avant-courier;* or shall we storm the citadel unannounced?"

"Uncle is out," she informed us. "He went for a walk along the Drive."

"And Mr. Arnesson, I suppose, has not yet returned from the university."

"No; but he'll be here for lunch. He has no classes Tuesday afternoons."

"In the meantime, then, we'll confer with Beedle and the admirable Pyne.—And I might suggest that it would do Mrs. Drukker no end of good if you'd pay her a visit."

With a troubled smile and a little nod the girl passed out through the basement door.

Heath at once went in search of Beedle and Pyne and brought them to the drawing-room, where Vance questioned them about the preceding night. No information, however, was obtained from them. They had both gone to bed at ten o'clock. Their rooms were on the fourth floor at the side of the house; and they had not even heard Miss Dillard when she re-

turned from the theatre. Vance asked them about noises on the range, and intimated that the screen-porch door of the Drukkers might have slammed shut at about midnight. But apparently both of them had been asleep at that hour. Finally they were dismissed with a warning not to mention to any one the questions that had just been asked them.

Five minutes later Professor Dillard came in. Though surprised to see us, he greeted us amiably.

"For once, Markham, you've chosen an hour for your visit when I am not absorbed in work.—More questions, I suppose. Well, come along to the library for the inquisition. It'll be more comfortable there." He led the way up-stairs, and when we were seated he insisted that we join him in a glass of port which he himself served from the sideboard.

"Drukker should be here," he remarked. "He has a fondness for my 'Ninety-six,' though he'll drink it only on rare occasions. I tell him he should take more port; but he imagines it's bad for him, and points to my gout. But there's no connection between gout and port—the notion is sheer superstition. Sound port is the most wholesome of wines. Gout is unknown in Oporto. A little physical stimulation of the right kind would be good for Drukker. . . . Poor fellow. His mind is like a furnace that's burning his body up. A brilliant man, Markham. If he had sufficient bodily energy to keep pace with his brain, he'd be one of the world's great physicists."

"He tells me," commented Vance, "that you twitted him on his inability to work out a modification of the quantum theory in regard to light-interference."

The old man smiled ruefully.

"Yes. I knew that such a criticism would spur him to a maximum effort. The fact is, Drukker is on the track of something revolutionary. He has already worked out some very interesting theorems. . . . But I'm sure this isn't what you gentlemen came here to discuss. What can I do for you, Markham? Or, perhaps you came to give me news."

"Unfortunately we have no news. We have come to solicit aid again. . . ." Markham hesitated as if uncertain how to proceed; and Vance assumed the rôle of questioner.

"The situation has changed somewhat since we were here yesterday. One or two new matters have arisen, and there is a possibility that our investigation would be facilitated if we knew the exact movements of the members of your household last night. These movements, in fact, may have influenced certain factors in the case."

The professor lifted his head in some surprise, but made no comment. He said merely: "That information is very easily given. To what members do you refer?"

"To no member specifically," Vance hastened to assure him.

"Well, let me see. . . ." He took out his old meerschaum pipe and began filling it. "Belle and Sigurd and I had dinner alone at six o'clock. At half past seven Drukker dropped in, and a few minutes later Pardee called. Then at eight Sigurd and Belle went to the theatre, and at half past ten Drukker and Pardee went away. I myself turned in shortly after eleven, after locking up the house—I'd let Pyne and Beedle go to bed early.—And that's about all I can tell you."

"Do I understand that Miss Dillard and Mr. Arnesson went to the theatre together?"

"Yes. Sigurd rarely patronizes the theatre, but whenever he does he takes Belle along. He attends Ibsen's plays, for the most part. He's a devout disciple of Ibsen's, by the way. His American upbringing hasn't in the least tempered his enthusiasm for things Norwegian. At heart he's quite loyal to his native country. He's as well grounded in Norwegian literature as any professor at the University of Oslo; and the only music he really cares for is Grieg's. When he goes to concerts or the theatre you're pretty sure to find that the programs are liberally Norwegian."

"It was an Ibsen play, then, he attended last night?"

" 'Rosmersholm,' I believe. There's a revival of Ibsen's dramas at present in New York."

Vance nodded. "Walter Hampden's doing them. —Did you see either Mr. Arnesson or Miss Dillard after they returned from the theatre?"

"No; they came in rather late, I imagine. Belle told me this morning they went to the Plaza for supper after the play. However, Sigurd will be here at any minute, and you can learn the details from him." Though the professor spoke with patience, it was plain that he was annoyed by the apparently irrelevant nature of the interrogation.

"Will you be good enough, sir," pursued Vance, "to tell us the circumstances connected with Mr. Drukker's and Mr. Pardee's visit here after dinner?"

"There was nothing unusual about their call. They often drop in during the evening. The object

of Drukker's visit was to discuss with me the work he had done on his modification of the quantum theory; but when Pardee appeared the discussion was dropped. Pardee is a good mathematician, but advanced physics is beyond his depth."

"Did either Mr. Drukker or Mr. Pardee see Miss Dillard before she went to the theatre?"

Professor Dillard took his pipe slowly from his mouth, and his expression became resentful.

"I must say," he replied testily, "that I can see no valid object in my answering such questions.—However," he added, in a more indulgent tone, "if the domestic trivia of my household can be of any possible assistance to you, I will of course be glad to go into detail." He regarded Vance a moment. "Yes, both Drukker and Pardee saw Belle last night. All of us, including Sigurd, were together in this room for perhaps half an hour before theatre time. There was even a casual discussion about Ibsen's genius, in which Drukker annoyed Sigurd greatly by maintaining Hauptmann's superiority."

"Then at eight o'clock, I gather, Mr. Arnesson and Miss Dillard departed, leaving you and Mr. Pardee and Mr. Drukker alone here."

"That is correct."

"And at half past ten, I think you said, Mr. Drukker and Mr. Pardee went away. Did they go together?"

"They went down-stairs together," the professor answered, with more than a suggestion of tartness. "Drukker, I believe, went home; but Pardee had an appointment at the Manhattan Chess Club."

"It seems a bit early for Mr. Drukker to have gone

home," mused Vance, "especially as he had come to discuss an important matter with you and had had no adequate opportunity to do so up to the time of his departure."

"Drukker is not well." The professor's voice was again studiously patient. "As I've told you, he tires easily. And last night he was unusually played out. In fact, he complained to me of his fatigue and said he was going immediately to bed."

"Yes . . . quite in keeping," murmured Vance. "He told us a little while ago that he was up working at six yesterday morning."

"I'm not surprised. Once a problem has posed itself in his mind he works on it incessantly. Unfortunately he has no normal reactions to counterbalance his consuming passion for mathematics. There have been times when I've feared for his mental stability."

Vance, for some reason, steered clear of this point.

"You spoke of Mr. Pardee's engagement at the Chess Club last night," he said, when he had carefully lighted a fresh cigarette. "Did he mention the nature of it to you?"

Professor Dillard smiled with patronizing lenity.

"He talked about it for fully an hour. It appears that a gentleman named Rubinstein—a genius of the chess world, I understand, who is now visiting this country—had taken him on for three exhibition games. The last one was yesterday. It began at two o'clock, and was postponed at six. It should have been played off at eight, but Rubinstein was the lion of some dinner down-town; so the hour set for the play-off was eleven. Pardee was on tenter-hooks,

for he had lost the first game and drawn the second; and if he could have won last night's game he would have broken even with Rubinstein. He seemed to think he had an excellent chance according to the way the game stood at six o'clock; although Drukker disagreed with him. . . . He must have gone directly from here to the club, for it was fully half past ten when he and Drukker went out."

"Rubinstein's a strong player," observed Vance. A new note of interest, which he strove to conceal, had come into his voice. "He's one of the grand masters of the game. He defeated Capablanca at San Sebastian in 1911, and between 1907 and 1912 was considered the logical contender for the world's title held by Doctor Lasker.* . . . Yes, it would have been a great feather in Pardee's cap to have beaten him. Indeed, it was no small compliment to him that he should have been matched with Rubinstein. Pardee, despite the fame of his gambit, has never been ranked as a master.—Have you heard the result of last night's game, by the by?"

Again I noted a faint tolerant smile at the corners of the professor's mouth. He gave the impression of looking down benevolently on the foolish capers of children from some great intellectual height.

"No," he answered; "I didn't inquire. But my surmise is that Pardee lost; for when Drukker pointed out the weakness of his adjourned position, he was more positive than usual. Drukker by nature

* Akiba Rubinstein was then, and is to-day, the chess champion of Poland and one of the great international masters of the game. He was born in Stavisk, near Lodz, in 1882, and made his début in international chess at the Ostend tournament in 1906. His recent visit to America resulted in a series of new triumphs.

is cautious, and he rarely expresses a definite opinion on a problem without having excellent grounds for so doing."

Vance raised his eyebrows in some astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me that Pardee analyzed his unfinished game with Drukker and discussed the possibilities of its ending? Not only is such a course unethical, but any player would be disqualified for doing such a thing."

"I'm unfamiliar with the punctilio of chess," Professor Dillard returned acidly; "but I am sure Pardee would not be guilty of a breach of ethics in that regard. And, as a matter of fact, I recall that when he was engaged with the chessmen at the table over there and Drukker stepped up to look on, Pardee requested him to offer no advice. The discussion of the position took place some time later, and was kept entirely to generalities. I don't believe there was a mention of any specific line of play."

Vance leaned slowly forward and crushed out his cigarette with that taut deliberation which I had long since come to recognize as a sign of repressed excitement. Then he rose carelessly and moved to the chess table in the corner. He stood there, one hand resting on the exquisite marquetry of the alternating squares.

"You say that Mr. Pardee was analyzing his position on this board when Mr. Drukker came over to him?"

"Yes, that is right." Professor Dillard spoke with forced politeness. "Drukker sat down facing him and studied the layout. He started to make some remark, and Pardee requested him to say nothing.

A quarter of an hour or so later Pardee put the men away; and it was then that Drukker told him that his game was lost—that he had worked himself into a position which, though it looked favorable, was fundamentally weak."

Vance had been running his fingers aimlessly over the board; and he had taken two or three of the men from the box and tossed them back, as if toying with them.

"Do you remember just what Mr. Drukker said?" he asked without looking up.

"I didn't pay very close attention—the subject was not exactly one of burning moment to me." There was an unescapable note of irony in the answer. "But, as nearly as I can recall, Drukker said that Pardee could have won provided it had been a rapid-transit game, but that Rubinstein was a notoriously slow and careful player and would inevitably find the weak spot in Pardee's position."

"Did Pardee resent this criticism?" Vance now strolled back to his chair and selected another cigarette from his case; but he did not sit down again.

"He did—very much. Drukker has an unfortunately antagonistic manner. And Pardee is hypersensitive on the subject of his chess. The fact is, he went white with anger at Drukker's strictures. But I personally changed the subject; and when they went away the incident had apparently been forgotten."

We remained but a few minutes longer. Markham was profuse in his apologies to the professor and sought to make amends for the patent annoyance our visit had caused him. He was not pleased with Vance

for his seemingly garrulous insistence on the details of Pardee's chess game, and when we had descended to the drawing-room he expressed his displeasure.

"I could understand your questions relating to the whereabouts of the various occupants of this house last night, but I could see no excuse for your harping on Pardee's and Drukker's disagreement over a game of chess. We have other things to do besides gossip."

"A hate of gossip parlance also crown'd Tennyson's Isabel thro' all her placid life," Vance returned puckishly. "But—my word, Markham!—our life is not like Isabel's. Speakin' seriously, there was method in my gossip. I prattled—and I learned."

"You learned what?" Markham demanded sharply.

With a cautious glance into the hall Vance leaned forward and lowered his voice.

"I learned, my dear Lycurgus, that a black bishop is missing from that set in the library, and that the chessman left at Mrs. Drukker's door matches the other pieces up-stairs!"

CHAPTER XV

AN INTERVIEW WITH PARDEE

(Tuesday, April 12; 12.30 p. m.)

This piece of news had a profound effect on Markham. As was his habit when agitated, he rose and began pacing back and forth, his hands clasped behind him. Heath, too, though slower to grasp the significance of Vance's revelation, puffed vigorously on his cigar—an indication that his mind was busy with a difficult adjustment of facts.

Before either had formulated any comment the rear door of the hall opened and light footsteps approached the drawing-room. Belle Dillard, returning from Mrs. Drukker's, appeared in the archway. Her face was troubled, and letting her eyes rest on Markham, she asked:

"What did you say to Adolph this morning? He's in an awful state of funk. He's going about testing all the door-locks and window-catches as if he feared burglars; and he has frightened poor Grete by telling her to be sure to bolt herself in at night."

"Ah! He has warned Mrs. Menzel, has he?" mused Vance. "Very interestin'."

The girl's gaze turned swiftly to him.

"Yes; but he will give me no explanation. He's excited and mysterious. And the strangest thing about his attitude is that he refuses to go near his

mother. . . . What does it mean, Mr. Vance? I feel as though something terrible were impending."

"I don't know just what it does mean." Vance spoke in a low, distressed voice. "And I'm afraid even to try to interpret it. If I should be wrong. . . ." He became silent for a moment. "We must wait and see. To-night perhaps we'll know.—But there's no cause for alarm on your part, Miss Dillard." He smiled comfortingly. "How did you find Mrs. Drukker?"

"She seemed much better. But there's still something worrying her; and I think it has to do with Adolph, for she talked about him the whole time I was there, and kept asking me if I'd noticed anything unusual in his manner lately."

"That's quite natural in the circumstances," Vance returned. "But you mustn't let her morbid attitude affect you.—And now, to change the subject: I understand that you were in the library for half an hour or so last night just before you went to the theatre. Tell me, Miss Dillard: where was your hand-bag during that time?"

The question startled her; but after a momentary hesitation she answered: "When I came into the library I placed it with my wrap on the little table by the door."

"It was the lizard-skin bag containing the key?"

"Yes. Sigurd hates evening dress, and when we go out together I always wear my day clothes."

"So you left the bag on the table during that half-hour, and then kept it with you the rest of the evening.—And what about this morning?"

"I went out for a walk before breakfast and car-

ried it with me. Later I put it on the hat-rack in the hall for an hour or so; but when I started for Lady Mae's at about ten I took it with me. It was then I discovered that the little pistol had been returned, and I postponed my call. I left the bag down-stairs in the archery-room until you and Mr. Markham came; and I've had it with me ever since."

Vance thanked her whimsically.

"And now that the peregrinations of the bag have been thoroughly traced, please try to forget all about it." She was on the point of asking a question, but he anticipated her curiosity and said quickly: "You went to the Plaza for supper last night, your uncle told us. You must have been late in getting home."

"I never stay out very late when I go anywhere with Sigurd," she answered, with a maternal note of complaint. "He has a constitutional aversion to any kind of night life. I begged him to stay out longer, but he looked so miserable I hadn't the heart to remain. We actually got home at half past twelve."

Vance rose with a gracious smile.

"You've been awfully good to bear with our foolish questions so patiently. . . . Now we're going to drop in on Mr. Pardee and see if he has any illuminatin' suggestions to offer. He's generally in at this time, I believe."

"I'm sure he's in now." The girl walked with us to the hall. "He was here only a little while before you came, and he said he was returning home to attend to some correspondence."

We were about to go out when Vance paused.

"Oh, I say, Miss Dillard; there's one point I forgot to ask you about. When you came home last

night with Mr. Arnesson, how did you know it was just half past twelve? I notice you don't wear a watch."

"Sigurd told me," she explained. "I was rather mean to him for bringing me home so early, and as we entered the hall here I asked him spitefully what time it was. He looked at his watch and said it was half past twelve. . . ."

At that moment the front door opened and Arnesson came in. He stared at us in mock astonishment; then he caught sight of Belle Dillard.

"Hallo, sis," he called to her pleasantly. "In the hands of the *gendarmerie*, I see." He flashed us an amused look. "Why the conclave? This house is becoming a regular police station. Hunting for clews of Sprigg's murderer? Ha! Bright youth done away with by his jealous professor, and that sort of thing, eh? . . . Hope you chaps haven't been putting Diana the Huntress through a third degree."

"Nothing of the kind," the girl spoke up. "They've been most considerate. And I've been telling them what an old fogy you are—bringing me home at half past twelve."

"I think I was very indulgent," grinned Arnesson. "Much too late for a child like you to be out."

"It must be terrible to be senile and—and mathematically inclined," she retorted with some heat, and ran up-stairs.

Arnesson shrugged his shoulders and looked after her until she had disappeared. Then he fixed a cynical eye on Markham.

"Well, what glad tidings do you bring? Any news

about the latest victim?" He led the way back to the drawing-room. "You know, I miss that lad. He'd have gone far. Rotten shame he had to be named Johnny Sprigg. Even 'Peter Piper' would have been safer. Nothing happened to Peter Piper aside from the pepper episode; and you couldn't very well work that up into a murder. . . ."

"We have nothing to report, Arnesson," Markham broke in, nettled by the man's flippancy. "The situation remains unchanged."

"Just dropped in for a social call, I presume. Staying for lunch?"

"We reserve the right," said Markham coldly, "to investigate the case in whatever manner we deem advisable. Nor are we accountable to you for our actions."

"So! Something *has* happened that irks you." Arnesson spoke with sarcasm. "I thought I had been accepted as a coadjutor; but I see I am to be turned forth into the darkness." He sighed elaborately and took out his pipe. "Dropping the pilot!—Bismarck and me. Alas!"

Vance had been smoking dreamily near the archway, apparently oblivious of Arnesson's complaining. Now he stepped into the room.

"Really, y' know, Markham, Mr. Arnesson is quite right. We agreed to keep him posted; and if he's to be of any help to us he must know all the facts."

"It was you yourself," protested Markham, "who pointed out the possible danger of mentioning last night's occurrence. . . ."

"True. But I had forgotten at the time our promise to Mr. Arnesson. And I'm sure his discre-

tion can be relied on." Then Vance related in detail Mrs. Drukker's experience of the night before.

Arnesson listened with rapt attention. I noticed that his sardonic expression gradually disappeared, and that in its place came a look of calculating sombreness. He sat for several minutes in contemplative silence, his pipe in his hand.

"That's certainly a vital factor in the problem," he commented at length. "It changes our constant. I can see that this thing has got to be calculated from a new angle. The Bishop, it appears, is in our midst. But why should he come to haunt Lady Mae?"

"She is reported to have screamed at almost the exact moment of Robin's death."

"Aha!" Arnesson sat up. "I grasp your implication. She saw the Bishop from her window on the morning of Cock Robin's dissolution, and later he returned and perched on her door-knob as a warning for her to keep mum."

"Something like that, perhaps. . . . Have you enough integers now to work out your formula?"

"I'd like to cast an eye on this black bishop. Where is it?"

Vance reached in his pocket, and held out the chessman. Arnesson took it eagerly. His eyes glittered for a moment. He turned the piece over in his hand, and then gave it back.

"You seem to recognize this particular bishop," said Vance dulcetly. "You're quite correct. It was borrowed from your chess set in the library."

Arnesson nodded a slow affirmative.

"I believe it was." Suddenly he turned to Mark-

ham, and an ironic leer came over his lean features. "Was that why I was to be kept in the dark? Under suspicion, am I? Shades of Pythagoras! What penalty attaches to the heinous crime of distributing chessmen among one's neighbors?"

Markham got up and walked toward the hall.

"You are not under suspicion, Arnesson," he answered, with no attempt to conceal his ill-humor. "The bishop was left at Mrs. Drukker's at exactly midnight."

"And I was half an hour too late to qualify. Sorry to have disappointed you."

"Let us hear if your formula works out," said Vance, as we passed out of the front door. "We've a little visit to pay to Mr. Pardee now."

"Pardee? Oho! Calling in a chess expert on the subject of bishops, eh? I see your reasoning—it at least has the virtue of being simple and direct. . . ."

He stood on the little porch and watched us, like a japish gargoyle, as we crossed the street.

Pardee received us with his customary quiet courtesy. The tragic, frustrated look which was a part of his habitual expression was even more pronounced than usual; and when he drew up chairs for us in his study his manner was that of a man whose interest in life had died, and who was merely going through the mechanical motions of living.

"We have come here, Mr. Pardee," Vance began, "to learn what we can of Sprigg's murder in Riverside Park yesterday morning. We have excellent reasons for every question we are about to ask you."

Pardee nodded resignedly.

"I shall not be offended at any line of interroga-

tion you take. After reading the papers I realize just how unusual a problem you are facing."

"First, then, please inform us where you were yesterday morning between seven and eight."

A faint flush overspread Pardee's face, but he answered in a low, even voice.

"I was in bed. I did not rise until nearly nine."

"Is it not your habit to take a walk in the park before breakfast?" (I knew this was sheer guesswork on Vance's part, for the subject of Pardee's habits had not come up during the investigation.)

"That is quite true," the man replied, without a moment's hesitation. "But yesterday I did not go, —I had worked rather late the night before."

"When did you first hear of Sprigg's death?"

"At breakfast. My cook repeated the gossip of the neighborhood. I read the official account of the tragedy in the early edition of the evening *Sun*."

"And you saw the reproduction of the Bishop note, of course, in this morning's paper.—What is your opinion of the affair, Mr. Pardee?"

"I hardly know." For the first time his lacklustre eyes showed signs of animation. "It's an incredible situation. The mathematical chances are utterly opposed to such a series of interrelated events being coincidental."

"Yes," Vance concurred. "And speaking of mathematics: are you at all familiar with the Riemann-Christoffel tensor?"

"I know of it," the man admitted. "Drukker uses it in his book on world lines. My mathematics, however, are not of the physicist's type. Had I not become enamored of chess"—he smiled sadly—"I would

have been an astronomer. Next to manœuvring the factors in a complicated chess combination, the greatest mental satisfaction one can get, I think, is plotting the heavens and discovering new planets. I even keep a five-inch equatorial telescope in a pent-house on my roof for amateur observations."

Vance listened to Pardee with close attention; and for several minutes discussed with him Professor Pickering's recent determination of the trans-Neptunean *O*,* much to Markham's bewilderment and to the Sergeant's annoyance. At length he brought the conversation back to the tensor formula.

"You were, I understand, at the Dillards' last Thursday when Mr. Arnesson was discussing this tensor with Drukker and Sprigg."

"Yes, I recall that the subject came up then."

"How well did you know Sprigg?"

"Only casually. I had met him with Arnesson once or twice."

"Sprigg, also, it seems, was in the habit of walking in Riverside Park before breakfast," observed Vance negligently. "Ever run into him there, Mr. Pardee?"

The man's eyelids quivered slightly, and he hesitated before answering.

"Never," he said finally.

Vance appeared indifferent to the denial. He rose and, going to the front window, looked out.

"I thought one might be able to see into the archery range from here. But I note that the angle cuts off the view entirely."

* Since this discussion took place Professor Pickering has posited from the perturbations of Uranus, two other outer planets beyond Neptune: *P* and *S*.

"Yes, the range is quite private. There's even a vacant lot opposite the wall, so that no one can see over it. . . . Were you thinking of a possible witness to Robin's death?"

"That, and other things." Vance returned to his chair. "You don't go in for archery, I take it."

"It's a trifle too strenuous for me. Miss Dillard once tried to interest me in the sport, but I was not a very promising acolyte. I've been to several tournaments with her, however."

An unusually soft note had crept into Pardee's voice, and for some reason which I could not exactly explain I got the feeling that he was fond of Belle Dillard. Vance, too, must have received the same impression, for after a brief pause he said:

"You will realize, I trust, that it is not our intention to pry unnecessarily into any one's private affairs; but the question of motive in the two murders we are investigating still remains obscure, and as Robin's death was at first superficially attributed to a rivalry for Miss Dillard's affections, it might help us to know, in a general way, what the true situation is concerning the young lady's preference. . . . As a friend of the family you probably know; and we'd appreciate your confidence in the matter."

Pardee's gaze travelled out of the window, and the suggestion of a sigh escaped him.

"I've always had the feeling that she and Arnesson would some day be married. But that is only conjecture. She once told me quite positively that she was not going to consider matrimony until she was thirty." (One could easily guess in what connection Belle Dillard had made this pronouncement

to Pardee. His emotional, as well as his intellectual life, had apparently met with failure.)

"You do not believe then," pursued Vance, "that her heart is seriously concerned with young Sperling?"

Pardee shook his head. "However," he qualified, "martyrdom such as he is undergoing at present has a tremendous sentimental appeal for women."

"Miss Dillard tells me you called on her this morning."

"I generally drop over during the day." He was obviously uncomfortable and, I thought, a little embarrassed.

"Do you know Mrs. Drukker well?"

Pardee gave Vance a quick, inquisitive look.

"Not particularly," he said. "I've naturally met her several times."

"You've called at her house?"

"On many occasions, but always to see Drukker. I've been interested for years in the relation of mathematics to chess. . . ."

Vance nodded.

"How did your game with Rubinstein come out last night, by the by? I didn't see the papers this morning."

"I resigned on the forty-fourth move." The man spoke hopelessly. "Rubinstein found a weakness in my attack which I had entirely overlooked when I sealed my move at the adjournment."

"Drukker, Professor Dillard tells us, foresaw the outcome when you and he were discussing the situation last night."

I could not understand why Vance referred so

pointedly to this episode, knowing as he did how sore a point it was with Pardee. Markham, also, frowned at what appeared to be an unforgivably tactless remark on Vance's part.

Pardee colored, and shifted in his chair.

"Drukker talked too much last night." The statement was not without venom. "Though he's not a tournament player, he should know that such discussions are taboo during unfinished games. Frankly, though, I put little stock in his prophecy. I thought my sealed move had taken care of the situation, but Drukker saw farther ahead than I did. His analysis was uncannily profound." There was the jealousy of self-pity in his tone, and I felt that he hated Drukker as bitterly as his seemingly mild nature would permit.

"How long did the game last?" Vance asked casually.

"It was over a little after one o'clock. There were only fourteen moves in last night's session."

"Were there many spectators?"

"An unusually large number, considering the late hour."

Vance put out his cigarette and got up. When we were in the lower hall on our way to the front door he halted suddenly and, fixing Pardee with a gaze of sardonic amusement, said:

"Y' know, the black bishop was at large again last night around midnight."

His words produced an astonishing effect. Pardee drew himself up as if he had been struck in the face; and his cheeks went chalky white. For a full half-minute he stared at Vance, his eyes like live coals.

His lips moved with a slight tremor, but no word came from them. Then, as if with superhuman effort, he turned stiffly away and went to the door. Jerking it open he held it for us to pass out.

As we walked up Riverside Drive to the District Attorney's car, which had been left in front of the Drukker house in 76th Street, Markham questioned Vance sharply in regard to the final remark he had made to Pardee.

"I was in hopes," explained Vance, "of surprising some look of recognition or understanding from him. But, 'pon my soul, Markham, I didn't expect any effect like the one I produced. Astonishin' how he reacted. I don't grasp it—I don't at all grasp it. . . ."

He became engrossed in his thoughts. But as the car swung into Broadway at 72nd Street he roused himself and directed the chauffeur to the Sherman Square Hotel.

"I have a gaspin' desire to know more of that chess game between Pardee and Rubinstein. No reason for it—sheer vagary on my part. But the idea has been workin' in me ever since the professor mentioned it. . . . From eleven until past one—that's a deuced long time to play off an unfinished game of only forty-four moves."

We had drawn up to the curb at the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 71st Street, and Vance disappeared into the Manhattan Chess Club. It was fully five minutes before he returned. In his hand he carried a sheet of paper filled with notations. There was, however, no sign of jubilance in his expression.

"My far-fetched but charmin' theory," he said

with a grimace, "has run aground on base prosaic facts. I just talked to the secret'ry of the club; and last night's session consumed two hours and nineteen minutes. It seems to have been a coruscatin' battle, full of esoteric quirks and strategical soul-searchin's. Along about half past eleven the onlooking genii had Pardee picked for the winner; but Rubinstein then staged a masterly piece of sustained analysis, and proceeded to tear Pardee's tactics to smithereens—just as Drukker had prognosticated. Astonishin' mind, Drukker's. . . ."

It was plain that even now he was not entirely satisfied with what he had learned; and his next words voiced his dissatisfaction.

"I thought while I was at it I'd take a page from the Sergeant's book, so to speak, and indulge in a bit of routine thoroughness. So I borrowed the score sheet of last night's game and copied down the moves. I may run over the game some day when time hangs heavy."

And, with what I thought unusual care, he folded the score and placed it in his wallet.

CHAPTER XVI

ACT THREE

(Tuesday, April 12—Saturday, April 16.)

After lunch at the Elysée Markham and Heath continued down-town. A hard afternoon lay before them. Markham's routine work had accumulated; and the Sergeant, having taken on the Sprigg case in addition to the Robin investigation, had to keep two separate machines working, co-ordinate all his reports, answer innumerable questions from his superiors, and attempt to satisfy the voraciousness of an army of reporters. Vance and I went to an exhibition of modern French art at Knoedler's, had tea at the St. Regis, and met Markham at the Stuyvesant Club for dinner. Heath and Inspector Moran joined us at half past eight for an informal conference; but though it lasted until nearly midnight nothing of a tangible nature came out of it.

Nor did the following day bring anything but discouragement. The report from Captain Dubois stated that the revolver given him by Heath contained no sign of a finger-print. Captain Hagedorn identified the weapon as the one used in the shooting of Sprigg; but this merely substantiated our already positive belief. The man set to guard the rear of the Drukker residence spent an uneventful night. No one had entered or departed from the house; and by eleven o'clock every window had been dark. Nor had

a sound of any kind come from the house until the next morning when the cook set about her chores for the day. Mrs. Drukker had appeared in the garden a little after eight; and at half past nine Drukker went out the front door and sat for two hours in the park reading.

Two days went by. A watch was kept on the Dillard house; Pardee was put under strict surveillance; and a man was stationed each night under the willow trees behind the Drukker house. But nothing unusual happened; and, despite the Sergeant's tireless activities, all promising lines of investigation seemed to be automatically closed. Both Heath and Markham were deeply worried. The newspapers were outdoing themselves in gaudy rhetoric; and the inability of the Police Department and the District Attorney's office to make the slightest headway against the mystery of the two spectacular murders was rapidly growing into a political scandal.

Vance called on Professor Dillard and discussed the case along general lines. He also spent over an hour on Thursday afternoon with Arnesson in the hope that the working out of the proposed formula had brought to light some detail that could be used as a starting-point for speculation. But he was dissatisfied with the interview, and complained to me that Arnesson had not been wholly frank with him. Twice he dropped in at the Manhattan Chess Club and attempted to lead Pardee into conversation; but each time he was met with the reticence of cold courtesy. I noticed that he made no effort to communicate with either Drukker or Mrs. Drukker; and when I asked him his reason for ignoring them, he answered:

"The truth cannot be learned from them now. Each is playing a game; and both are thoroughly frightened. Until we have some definite evidence, more harm than good will result from any attempt to cross-examine them."

This definite evidence was to come the very next day from a most unexpected quarter; and it marked the beginning of the last phase of our investigation —a phase fraught with such sinister, soul-stirring tragedy and unspeakable horror, with such wanton cruelty and monstrous humor, that even now, years later, as I set down this reportorial record of it, I find it difficult to believe that the events were not, after all, a mere grotesque dream of fabulous wickedness.

Friday afternoon Markham, in a mood of desperation, called another conference. Arnesson asked permission to attend; and at four o'clock we all met, including Inspector Moran, in the District Attorney's private room in the old Criminal Courts Building. Arnesson was unwontedly silent during the discussion, and not once did he indulge in his usual flippancy. He listened with close attention to all that was said, and seemed purposely to avoid expressing an opinion, even when directly appealed to by Vance.

We had been in conference perhaps half an hour when Swacker entered quietly and placed a memorandum on the District Attorney's desk. Markham glanced at it and frowned. After a moment he initialed two printed forms and handed them to Swacker.

"Fill these in right away and give them to Ben,"*

* Colonel Benjamin Hanlon, commanding officer of the Detective Division attached to the District Attorney's office.

he ordered. Then when the man had gone out through the outer-hall door, he explained the interruption. "Sperling has just sent a request to speak to me. He says he has information that may be of importance. I thought, in the circumstances, it might be well to see him now."

Ten minutes later Sperling was brought in by a deputy sheriff from the Tombs. He greeted Markham with a friendly boyish smile, and nodded pleasantly to Vance. He bowed—a bit stiffly, I thought—to Arnesson, whose presence seemed both to surprise and disconcert him. Markham motioned him to a chair, and Vance offered him a cigarette.

"I wanted to speak to you, Mr. Markham," he began, a bit diffidently, "about a matter which may be of help to you. . . . You remember, when you were questioning me about my being in the archery-room with Robin, you wanted to know which way Mr. Drukker went when he left us. I told you I didn't notice, except that he went out by the basement door. . . . Well, sir, I've had a lot of time to think lately; and I've naturally gone over in my mind all that happened that morning. I don't know just how to explain it, but everything has become a lot clearer now. Certain—what you might call impressions—have come back to me. . . ."

He paused and looked down at the carpet. Then lifting his head, he went on:

"One of these impressions has to do with Mr. Drukker—and that's why I wanted to see you. Just this afternoon I was—well, sort of pretending I was in the archery-room again, talking to Robin; and all of a sudden the picture of the rear window flashed

across my mind. And I remembered that when I had glanced out of the window that morning to see how the weather was for my trip, I had seen Mr. Drukker sitting in the arbor behind the house. . . ."

"At what time was this?" Markham demanded brusquely.

"Only a few seconds before I went to catch my train."

"Then you imply that Mr. Drukker, instead of leaving the premises, went to the arbor and remained there until you departed."

"It looks that way, sir." Sperling was reluctant to make the admission.

"You're quite sure you saw him?"

"Yes, sir. I remember distinctly now. I even recall the peculiar way he had his legs drawn up under him."

"You would swear to it," asked Markham gravely, "knowing that a man's life might rest on your testimony?"

"I'd swear to it, sir," Sperling returned simply.

When the sheriff had escorted his prisoner from the room, Markham looked at Vance.

"I think that gives us a foothold."

"Yes. The cook's testimony was of little value, since Drukker merely denied it; and she's the type of loyal stubborn German who'd back up his denial if any real danger threatened him. Now we're armed with an effective weapon."

"It seems to me," Markham said, after a few moments of speculative silence, "that we have a good circumstantial case against Drukker. He was in the Dillard yard only a few seconds before Robin was

killed. He could easily have seen when Sperling went away; and, as he had recently come from Professor Dillard, he knew that the other members of the family were out. Mrs. Drukker denied she saw any one from her window that morning, although she screamed at the time of Robin's death and then went into a panic of fear when we came to question Drukker. She even warned him against us and called us 'the enemy.' My belief is she saw Drukker returning home immediately after Robin's body had been placed on the range.—Drukker was not in his room at the time Sprigg was killed, and both he and his mother have been at pains to cover up the fact. He has become excited whenever we broached the subject of the murders, and has ridiculed the idea that they were connected. In fact, many of his actions have been highly suspicious. Also, we know he is abnormal and unbalanced, and that he is given to playing children's games. It's quite possible—in view of what Doctor Barstead told us—that he has confused fantasy and reality, and perpetrated these crimes in a moment of temporary insanity. The tensor formula is not only familiar to him, but he may have associated it in some crazy way with Sprigg as a result of Arnesson's discussion with Sprigg about it.—As for the Bishop notes, they may have been part of the unreality of his insane games,—children all want an approving audience when they invent any new form of amusement. His choice of the word 'bishop' was probably the result of his interest in chess—a playful signature intended to confuse. And this supposition is further borne out by the actual appearance of a chess bishop on his mother's door. He may have

feared that she saw him that morning, and thus sought to silence her without openly admitting to her that he was guilty. He could easily have slammed the screen-porch door from the inside, without having had a key, and thereby given the impression that the bearer of the bishop had entered and departed by the rear door. Furthermore, it would have been a simple matter for him to take the bishop from the library the night Pardee was analyzing his game. . . ."

Markham continued for some time building up his case against Drukker. He was thorough and detailed, and his summation accounted for practically all of the evidence that had been adduced. The logical and relentless way in which he pieced his various factors together was impressively convincing; and a long silence followed his résumé.

Vance at length stood up, as if to break the tension of his thoughts, and walked to the window.

"You may be right, Markham," he admitted. "But my chief objection to your conclusion is that the case against Drukker is too good. I've had him in mind as a possibility from the first; but the more suspiciously he acted and the more the indications pointed toward him, the more I felt inclined to dismiss him from consideration. The brain that schemed these abominable murders is too competent, too devilishly shrewd, to become entangled in any such net of circumstantial evidence as you've drawn about Drukker. Drukker has an amazing mentality—his intelligence and intellect are supernormal, in fact; and it's difficult to conceive of him, if guilty, leaving so many loopholes."

"The law," returned Markham with acerbity, "can hardly be expected to throw out cases because they're too convincing."

"On the other hand," pursued Vance, ignoring the comment, "it is quite obvious that Drukker, even if not guilty, knows something that has a direct and vital bearing on the case; and my humble suggestion is that we attempt to prise this information out of him. Sperling's testimony has given us the lever for the purpose. . . . I say, Mr. Arnesson, what's your opinion?"

"Haven't any," the man answered. "I'm a disinterested onlooker. I'd hate, however, to see poor Adolph in durance vile." Though he would not commit himself it was plain that he agreed with Vance.

Heath thought, characteristically, that immediate action was advisable, and expressed himself to that effect.

"If he's got anything to tell he'll tell it quick enough after he's locked up."

"It's a difficult situation," Inspector Moran demurred, in a soft judicial voice. "We can't afford to make an error. If Drukker's evidence should convict some one else, we'd be a laughing-stock if we had arrested the wrong man."

Vance looked toward Markham and nodded agreement.

"Why not have him on the tapis first, and see if he can't be persuaded to unburden his soul. You might dangle a warrant over his head, don't y' know, as a kind of moral inducement. Then, if he remains coy and reticent, bring out the gyves and have the doughty Sergeant escort him to the bastille."

Markham sat tapping indecisively on the desk, his head enveloped in smoke as he puffed nervously on his cigar. At last he set his chin firmly and turned to Heath.

"Bring Drukker here at nine o'clock to-morrow morning. You'd better take a wagon and a John-Doe warrant in case he offers any objection." His face was grim and determined. "Then I'll find out what he knows—and act accordingly."

The conference broke up immediately. It was after five o'clock, and Markham and Vance and I rode up-town together to the Stuyvesant Club. We dropped Arnesson at the subway, and he took leave of us with scarcely a word. His garrulous cynicism seemed entirely to have deserted him. After dinner Markham pleaded fatigue, and Vance and I went to the Metropolitan and heard Geraldine Farrar in "Louise."*

The next morning broke dark and misty. Currie called us at half past seven, for Vance intended to be present at the interview with Drukker; and at eight o'clock we had breakfast in the library before a light grate fire. We were held up in the traffic on our way down-town, and though it was quarter after nine when we reached the District Attorney's office, Drukker and Heath had not yet arrived.

Vance settled himself comfortably in a large leather-upholstered chair and lighted a cigarette.

"I feel rather bucked this morning," he remarked. "If Drukker tells his story, and if the tale is what I think it is, we'll know the combination to the lock."

His words had scarcely been uttered when Heath

* "Louise" was Vance's favorite modern opera, but he greatly preferred Mary Garden to Farrar in the title rôle.

burst into the office and, facing Markham without a word of greeting, lifted both arms and let them fall in a gesture of hopeless resignation.

"Well, sir, we ain't going to question Drukker this morning—or no other time," he blurted. "He fell offa that high wall in Riverside Park right near his house last night, and broke his neck. Wasn't found till seven o'clock this morning. His body's down at the morgue now. . . . Fine breaks we get!" He sank disgustedly into a chair.

Markham stared at him unbelievingly.

"You're sure?" he asked, with startled futility.

"I was up there before they removed the body. One of the local men phoned me about it just as I was leaving the office. I stuck around and got all the dope I could."

"What did you learn?" Markham was fighting against an overwhelming sense of discouragement.

"There wasn't much to find out. Some kids in the park found the body about seven o'clock this morning—lots of kids around, it being Saturday; and the local men hopped over and called a police surgeon. The doc said Drukker musta fallen off the wall about ten o'clock last night—killed instantly. The wall at that spot—right opposite 76th Street—is all of thirty feet above the playground. The top of it runs along the bridle path; and it's a wonder more people haven't broke their necks there. Kids are all the time walking along the stone ledge."

"Has Mrs. Drukker been notified?"

"No. I told 'em I'd attend to it. But I thought I'd come here first and see what you wanted done about it."

Markham leaned back dejectedly.

"I don't see that there's much of anything we can do."

"It might be well," suggested Vance, "to inform Arnesson. He'll probably be the one who'll have to look after things. . . . My word, Markham! I'm beginning to think that this case is a nightmare, after all. Drukker was our principal hope, and at the very moment when there's a chance of our forcing him to speak, he tumbles off of a wall——" Abruptly he stopped. "Off of a wall! . . ." As he repeated these words he leapt to his feet. "*A hunchback falls off of a wall! . . . A hunchback! . . .*"

We stared at him as if he had gone out of his mind; and I admit that the look on his face sent a chill over me. His eyes were fixed, like those of a man gazing at a malignant ghost. Slowly he turned to Markham, and said in a voice that I hardly recognized:

"It's another mad melodrama—another Mother-Goose rhyme. . . . 'Humpty Dumpty' this time!"

The astonished silence that followed was broken by a strained harsh laugh from the Sergeant.

"That's stretching things, ain't it, Mr. Vance?"

"It's preposterous!" declared Markham, studying Vance with genuine concern. "My dear fellow, you've let this case prey on your mind too much. Nothing has happened except that a man with a hump has fallen from the coping of a wall in the park. It's unfortunate, I know; and it's doubly unfortunate at just this time." He went to Vance and put his hand on his shoulder. "Let the Sergeant and me run this show—we're used to these things. Take a trip and

get a good rest. Why not go to Europe as you generally do in the spring——?"

"Oh, quite—quite." Vance sighed and smiled wearily. "The sea air would do me worlds of good, and all that. Bring me back to normal, what?—build up the wreck of this once noble brain. . . . I give up! The third act in this terrible tragedy is played almost before your eyes, and you serenely ignore it."

"Your imagination has got the better of you," Markham returned, with the patience of a deep affection. "Don't worry about it any more. Have dinner with me to-night. We'll talk it over then."

At this moment Swacker looked in, and spoke to the Sergeant.

"Quinan of the *World* is here. Wants to see you."

Markham swung about.

"*Oh, my God!* . . . Bring him in here!"

Quinan entered, waved us a cheery salutation, and handed the Sergeant a letter.

"Another *billet-doux*—received this morning.—What privileges do I get for being so big-hearted?"

Heath opened the letter as the rest of us looked on. At once I recognized the paper and the faint blue characters of the élite type. The note read:

> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
> Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
> All the king's horses and all the king's men
> Cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again.

Then came that ominous signature, in capitals: THE BISHOP.

CHAPTER XVII

AN ALL-NIGHT LIGHT

(Saturday, April 16; 9.30 a. m.)

When Heath had got rid of Quinan with promises such as would have gladdened any reporter's heart,* there were several minutes of tense silence in the office. "The Bishop" had been at his grisly work again; and the case had now become a terrible triplicate affair, with the solution apparently further off than ever. It was not, however, the insolubility of these incredible crimes that primarily affected us; rather was it the inherent horror that emanated, like a miasma, from the acts themselves.

Vance, who was pacing sombrely up and down, gave voice to his troubled emotions.

"It's damnable, Markham—it's the essence of unutterable evil. . . . Those children in the park—up early on their holiday in search of dreams—busy with their play and make-believe . . . and then the silencing reality—the awful, overpowering disillusion. . . . Don't you see the wickedness of it? Those children found Humpty Dumpty—*their* Humpty Dumpty, with whom they had played—lying dead

* It may be recalled that the *World's* accounts of the Bishop case were the envy of the other metropolitan newspapers. Sergeant Heath, though impartial in his statements of facts to the press, nevertheless managed to save several picturesque *bonnes-bouches* for Quinan, and permitted himself certain speculations which, while having no news value, gave the *World's* stories an added interest and color.

at the foot of the famous wall—a Humpty Dumpty they could touch and weep over, broken and twisted and never more to be put together. . . ."

He paused by the window and looked out. The mist had lifted, and a faint diffusion of spring sunlight lay over the gray stones of the city. The golden eagle on the New York Life Building glistened in the distance.

"I say; one simply mustn't get sentimental," he remarked with a forced smile, turning back to the room. "It decomposes the intelligence and stultifies the dialectic processes. Now that we know Drukker was not the capricious victim of the law of gravity, but was given a helpin' hand in his departure from this world, the sooner we become energetic, the better, what?"

Though his change of mood was an obvious *tour de force*, it roused the rest of us from our gloomy apathy. Markham reached for the telephone and made arrangements with Inspector Moran for Heath to handle the Drukker case. Then he called the Medical Examiner's office and asked for an immediate *post-mortem* report. Heath got up vigorously, and after taking three cups of ice-water, stood with legs apart, his derby pulled far down on his forehead, waiting for the District Attorney to indicate a line of action.

Markham moved restlessly.

"Several men from your department, Sergeant, were supposed to be keeping an eye on the Drukker and Dillard houses. Did you talk to any of them this morning?"

"I didn't have time, sir; and, anyway, I figured it

was only an accident. But I told the boys to hang around until I got back."

"What did the Medical Examiner have to say?"

"Only that it looked like an accident; and that Drukker had been dead about ten hours. . . ."

Vance interpolated a question.

"Did he mention a fractured skull in addition to the broken neck?"

"Well, sir, he didn't exactly say the skull was fractured, but he did state that Drukker had landed on the back of his head." Heath nodded understandingly. "I guess it'll prove to be a fracture all right —same like Robin and Sprigg."

"Undoubtedly. The technique of our murderer seems to be simple and efficacious. He strikes his victims on the vault, either stunning them or killing them outright, and then proceeds to cast them in the rôles he has chosen for them in his puppet-plays. Drukker was no doubt leaning over the wall, perfectly exposed for such an attack. It was misty, and the setting was somewhat obscured. Then came the blow on the head, a slight heave, and Drukker fell noiselessly over the parapet—the third sacrificial offering on the altar of old Mother Goose."

"What gets me," declared Heath with surly anger, "is why Guilfoyle,* the fellow I set to watch the rear of the Drukker house, didn't report the fact that Drukker was out all night. He returned to the Bureau at eight o'clock, and I missed him.—Don't you think, sir, it might be a good idea to find out what he knows before we go up-town?"

* Guilfoyle, it may be remembered, was one of the detectives who shadowed Tony Skeel in the Canary murder case.

Markham agreed, and Heath bawled an order over the telephone. Guilfoyle made the distance between Police Headquarters and the Criminal Courts Building in less than ten minutes. The Sergeant almost pounced on him as he entered.

"What time did Drukker leave the house last night?" he bellowed.

"About eight o'clock—right after he'd had dinner." Guilfoyle was ill at ease, and his tone had the wheedling softness of one who had been caught in a dereliction of duty.

"Which way did he go?"

"He came out the back door, walked down the range, and went into the Dillard house through the archery-room."

"Paying a social visit?"

"It looked that way, Sergeant. He spends a lot of time at the Dillards'."

"Huh! And what time did he come back home?"

Guilfoyle moved uneasily.

"It don't look like he came back home, Sergeant."

"Oh, it don't?" Heath's retort was ponderous with sarcasm. "I thought maybe after he'd broke his neck he mighta come back and passed the time of day with you."

"What I meant was, Sergeant——"

"You meant that Drukker—the bird you were supposed to keep an eye on—went to call on the Dillards at eight o'clock, and then you set down in the arbor, most likely, and took a little beauty nap. . . . What time did you wake up?"

"Say, listen!" Guilfoyle bristled. "I didn't take no nap. I was on the job all night. Just because I

didn't happen to see this guy come back home don't mean I was laying down on the watch."

"Well, if you didn't see him come back, why didn't you phone in that he was spending his week-end out of town or something?"

"I thought he musta come in by the front door."

"Thinking again, were you? Ain't your brain worn out this morning?"

"Have a heart, Sergeant. My job wasn't to tail Drukker. You told me to watch the house and see who went in and out, and that if there was any sign of trouble to bust in.—Now, here's what happened. Drukker went to the Dillards' at eight o'clock, and I kept my eye on the windows of the Drukker house. Along about nine o'clock the cook goes up-stairs and turns on the light in her room. Half an hour later the light goes out, and says I: 'She's put to bed.' Then along about ten o'clock the lights are turned on in Drukker's room——"

"What's this?"

"Yeh—you heard me. The lights go on in Drukker's room about ten o'clock; and I can see a shadow of somebody moving about.—Now, I ask you, Sergeant: wouldn't you yourself have took it for granted that the hunchback had come in by the front door?"

Heath grunted.

"Maybe so," he admitted. "You're sure it was ten o'clock?"

"I didn't look at my watch; but I'm here to tell you it wasn't far off of ten."

"And what time did the lights go out in Drukker's room?"

"They didn't go out. They stayed on all night.

He was a queer bird. He didn't keep regular hours, and twice before his lights were on till nearly morning."

"That's quite understandable," came Vance's lazy voice. "He has been at work on a difficult problem lately.—But tell us, Guilfoyle: what about the light in Mrs. Drukker's room?"

"Same as usual. The old dame always keeps a light burning in her room all night."

"Was there any one on guard in front of the Drukker house last night?" Markham asked Heath.

"Not after six o'clock, sir. We've had a man tailing Drukker during the day, but he goes off duty at six when Guilfoyle takes up his post in the rear."

There was a moment's silence. Then Vance turned to Guilfoyle.

"How far away were you last night from the door of the alleyway between the two apartment houses?"

The man paused to visualize the scene.

"Forty or fifty feet, say."

"And between you and the alleyway were the iron fence and some tree branches."

"Yes, sir. The view was more or less cut off, if that's what you mean."

"Would it have been possible for any one, coming from the direction of the Dillard house, to have gone out and returned by that door without your noticing him?"

"It mighta been done," the detective admitted; "provided, of course, the guy didn't want me to see him. It was foggy and dark last night, and there's always a lot of traffic noises from the Drive that woulda drowned out his movements if he was being extra cautious."

When the Sergeant had sent Guilfoyle back to the Bureau to await orders, Vance gave voice to his perplexity.

"It's a dashed complicated situation. Drukker called on the Dillards at eight o'clock, and at ten o'clock he was shoved over the wall in the park. As you observed, the note that Quinan just showed us was postmarked 11 p. m.—which means that it was probably typed *before the crime.* The Bishop therefore had planned his comedy in advance and prepared the note for the press. The audacity of it is amazin'. But there's one assumption we can tie to —namely, that the murderer was some one who knew of Drukker's exact whereabouts and proposed movements between eight and ten."

"I take it," said Markham, "your theory is that the murderer went and returned by the apartment-house alley."

"Oh, I say! I have no theory. I asked Guilfoyle about the alley merely in case we should learn that no one but Drukker was seen going to the park. In that event we could assume, as a tentative hypothesis, that the murderer had managed to avoid detection by taking the alleyway and crossing to the park in the middle of the block."

"With that possible route open to the murderer," Markham observed gloomily, "it wouldn't matter much who was seen going out with Drukker."

"That's just it. The person who staged this farce may have walked boldly into the park under the eyes of an alert myrmidon, or he may have hied stealthily through the alley."

Markham nodded an unhappy agreement.

"The thing that bothers me most, however," continued Vance, "is that light in Drukker's room all night. It was turned on at about the time the poor chap was tumbling into eternity. And Guilfoyle says that he could see some one moving about there after the light went on——"

He broke off, and stood for several seconds in an attitude of concentration.

"I say, Sergeant; I don't suppose you know whether or not Drukker's front-door key was in his pocket when he was found."

"No, sir; but I can find out in no time. The contents of his pockets are being held till after the autopsy."

Heath stepped to the telephone, and a moment later he was talking to the desk sergeant of the 68th-Street Precinct Station. Several minutes of waiting passed; then he grunted and banged down the receiver.

"Not a key of any kind on him."

"Ah!" Vance drew a deep puff on his cigarette and exhaled the smoke slowly. "I'm beginnin' to think that the Bishop purloined Drukker's key and paid a visit to his room after the murder. Sounds incredible, I know; but, for that matter, so does everything else that's happened in this fantastic business."

"But what, in God's name, would have been his object?" protested Markham incredulously.

"We don't know yet. But I have an idea that when we learn the motive of these astonishin' crimes, we'll understand why that visit was paid."

Markham, his face set austerely, took his hat from the closet

"We'd better be getting out there."

But Vance made no move. He remained standing by the desk smoking abstractedly.

"Y' know, Markham," he said, "it occurs to me that we should see Mrs. Drukker first. There was tragedy in that house last night: something strange took place there that needs explaining; and now perhaps she'll tell us the secret that has been locked up in her brain. Moreover, she hasn't been notified of Drukker's death, and with all the rumor and gossip in the neighborhood, word of some kind is sure to leak through to her before long. I fear the result of the shock when she hears the news. In fact, I'd feel better if we got hold of Barstead right away and took him with us. What do you say to my phoning him?"

Markham assented, and Vance briefly explained the situation to the doctor.

We drove up-town immediately, called for Barstead, and proceeded at once to the Drukker house. Our ring was answered by Mrs. Menzel, whose face showed plainly that she knew of Drukker's death. Vance, after one glance at her, led her into the drawing-room away from the stairs, and asked in a low tone:

"Has Mrs. Drukker heard the news?"

"Not yet," she answered, in a frightened, quavering voice. "Miss Dillard came over an hour ago, but I told her the mistress had gone out. I was afraid to let her up-stairs. Something's wrong. . . ." She began to tremble violently.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Menzel?" Vance placed a quieting hand on her arm.

"I don't know. But she hasn't made a sound all morning. She didn't come down for breakfast . . . and I'm afraid to go and call her."

"When did you hear of the accident?"

"Early—right after eight o'clock. The paper boy told me; and I saw all the people down on the Drive."

"Don't be frightened," Vance consoled her. "We have the doctor here, and we'll attend to everything."

He turned back to the hall and led the way upstairs. When we came to Mrs. Drukker's room he knocked softly and, receiving no answer, opened the door. The room was empty. The night-light still burned on the table, and I noticed that the bed had not been slept in.

Without a word Vance retraced his steps down the hall. There were only two other main doors, and one of them, we knew, led to Drukker's study. Unhesitatingly Vance stepped to the other and opened it without knocking. The window shades were drawn, but they were white and semi-transparent, and the gray daylight mingled with the ghastly yellow radiation from the old-fashioned chandelier. The lights which Guilfoyle had seen burning all night had not been extinguished.

Vance halted on the threshold, and I saw Markham, who was just in front of me, give a start.

"Mother o' God!" breathed the Sergeant, and crossed himself.

On the foot of the narrow bed lay Mrs. Drukker, fully clothed. Her face was ashen white; her eyes were set in a hideous stare; and her hands were clutching her breast.

Barstead sprang forward and leaned over. After

touching her once or twice he straightened up and shook his head slowly.

"She's gone. Been dead probably most of the night." He bent over the body again and began making an examination. "You know, she's suffered for years from chronic nephritis, arteriosclerosis, and hypertrophy of the heart. . . . Some sudden shock brought on an acute dilatation. . . . Yes, I'd say she died about the same time as Drukker . . . round ten o'clock."

"A natural death?" asked Vance.

"Oh, undoubtedly. A shot of adrenalin in the heart might have saved her if I'd been here at the time. . . ."

"No signs of violence?"

"None. As I told you, she died from dilatation of the heart brought on by shock. A clear case—true to type in every respect."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WALL IN THE PARK

(Saturday, April 16; 11 a. m.)

When the doctor had straightened Mrs. Drukker's body on the bed and covered it with a sheet, we returned down-stairs. Barstead took his departure at once after promising to send the death certificate to the Sergeant within an hour.

"It's scientifically correct to talk of natural death from shock," said Vance, when we were alone; "but our immediate problem, d' ye see, is to ascertain the cause of that sudden shock. Obviously it's connected with Drukker's death. Now, I wonder. . . ."

Turning impulsively, he entered the drawing-room. Mrs. Menzel was sitting where we had left her, in an attitude of horrified expectancy. Vance went to her and said kindly:

"Your mistress died of heart failure during the night. And it's much better that she should not have outlived her son."

"*Gott geb' ihr die ewige Ruh'!*" the woman murmured piously. "*Ja*, it is best. . . ."

"The end came at about ten last night.—Were you awake at that time, Mrs. Menzel?"

"All night I was awake." She spoke in a low, awed voice.

Vance contemplated her with eyes half shut.

"Tell us what you heard?"

"Somebody came here last night!"

"Yes, some one came at about ten o'clock—by the front door. Did you hear him enter?"

"No; but after I had gone to bed I heard voices in Mr. Drukker's room."

"Was it unusual to hear voices in his room at ten o'clock at night?"

"But it wasn't *him!* He had a high voice, and this one was low and gruff." The woman looked up in bewildered fright. "And the other voice was Mrs. Drukker's . . . and she never went in Mr. Drukker's room at night!"

"How could you hear so plainly with your door shut?"

"My room is right over Mr. Drukker's," she explained. "And I was worried—what with all these awful things going on; so I got up and listened at the top of the steps."

"I can't blame you," said Vance. "What did you hear?"

"At first it was like as though the mistress was moaning, but right away she began to laugh, and then the man spoke angry-like. But pretty soon I heard him laugh, too. After that it sounded like the poor lady was praying—I could hear her saying 'Oh, God—oh, God!' Then the man talked some more—very quiet and low. . . . And in a little while it seemed like the mistress was—reciting—a poem. . . ."

"Would you recognize the poem if you heard it again? . . . Was it

> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall;
> Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. . . .?"

"*Bei Gott, das ist's!* It sounded just like that!" A new horror came into the woman's expression. "And Mr. Drukker fell from the wall last night. . . !"

"Did you hear anything else, Mrs. Menzel?" Vance's matter-of-fact voice interrupted her confused correlation of Drukker's death to the verse she had heard.

Slowly she shook her head.

"No. Everything was quiet after that."

"Did you hear any one leave Mr. Drukker's room?"

She gave Vance a panic-stricken nod.

"A few minutes later some one opened and shut the door, very soft; and I heard steps moving down the hall in the dark. Then the stairs creaked, and pretty soon the front door shut."

"What did you do after that?"

"I listened a little while, and then I went back to bed. But I couldn't sleep. . . ."

"It's all over now, Mrs. Menzel," Vance told her comfortingly. "There's nothing for you to fear.—You'd best go to your room and wait till we need you."

Reluctantly the woman went up-stairs.

"I think now," said Vance, "we can make a pretty close guess as to what happened here last night. The murderer took Drukker's key and let himself in by the front door. He knew Mrs. Drukker's quarters were at the rear, and he no doubt counted on accomplishing his business in Drukker's room and departing as he had come. But Mrs. Drukker heard him. It may be she associated him with 'the little man' who had left the black bishop at her door, and feared

that her son was in danger. At any rate, she went at once to Drukker's room. The door may have been slightly open, and I think she saw the intruder and recognized him. Startled and apprehensive, she stepped inside and asked him why he was there. He may have answered that he had come to inform her of Drukker's death—which would account for her moans and her hysterical laughter. But that was only a prelimin'ry on his part—a play for time. He was devising some means of meeting the situation—he was planning how he would kill her! Oh, there can be no doubt of that. He couldn't afford to let her leave that room alive. Maybe he told her so in as many words—he spoke 'angry-like,' you recall. And then he laughed. He was torturing her now—perhaps telling her the whole truth in a burst of insane egoism; and she could say only 'Oh God—oh God!' He explained how he had pushed Drukker over the wall. And did he mention Humpty Dumpty? I think he did; for what more appreciative audience could he have had for his monstrous jest than the victim's own mother? That last revelation proved too much for her hypersensitive brain. She repeated the nursery rhyme in a spell of horror; and then the accumulated shock dilated her heart. She fell across the bed, and the murderer was saved the necessity of sealing her lips with his own hands. He saw what had happened, and went quietly away."

Markham took a turn up and down the room.

"The least comprehensible part of last night's tragedy," he said, "is why this man should have come here after Drukker's death."

Vance was smoking thoughtfully.

"We'd better ask Arnesson to help us explain that point. Maybe he can throw some light on it."

"Yeh, maybe he can," chimed in Heath. Then after rolling his cigar between his lips for a moment, he added sulkily: "There's several people around here, I'm thinking, that could do some high-class explaining."

Markham halted before the Sergeant.

"The first thing we'd better do is to find out what your men know about the movements of the various persons hereabouts last night. Suppose you bring them here and let me question them.—How many were there, by the way?—and what were their posts?"

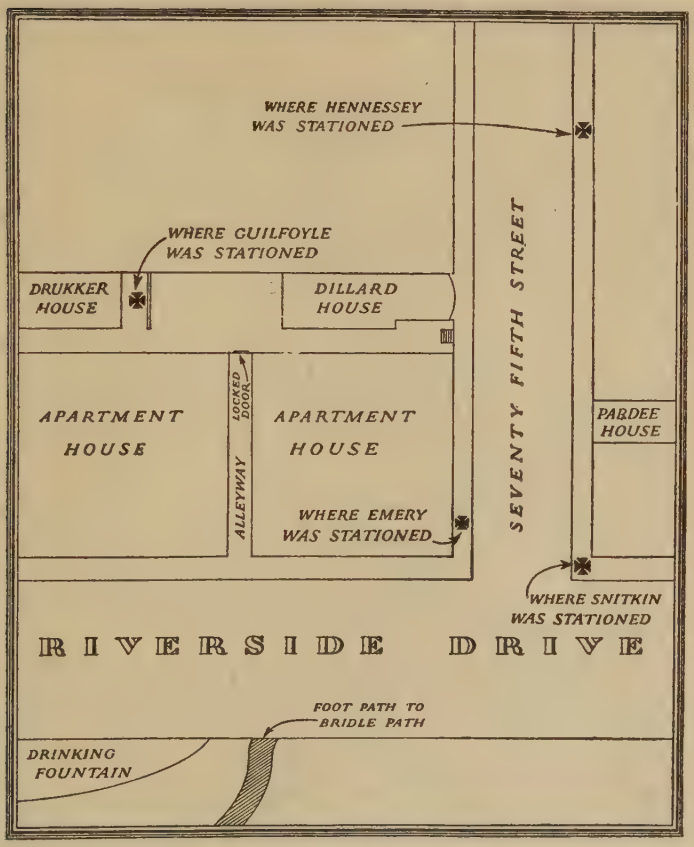
The Sergeant had risen, alert and energetic.

"There were three, sir, besides Guilfoyle. Emery was set to tail Pardee; Snitkin was stationed at the Drive and 75th Street to watch the Dillard house; and Hennessey was posted on 75th Street up near West End Avenue.—They're all waiting down at the place where Drukker was found. I'll get 'em up here *pronto*."

He disappeared through the front door, and in less than five minutes returned with the three detectives. I recognized them all, for each had worked on one or more of the cases in which Vance had figured.* Markham questioned Snitkin first as the one most likely to have information bearing directly on

* Hennessey had kept watch with Doctor Drumm over the Greene mansion from the Narcoss Flats, in the Greene murder case. Snitkin also had taken part in the Greene investigation, and had played a minor rôle in both the Benson and the Canary case. The dapper Emery was the detective who had unearthed the cigarette stubs from beneath the fire-logs in Alvin Benson's living-room.

the previous night's affair. The following points were brought out by his testimony:



Pardee had emerged from his house at 6.30 and gone straight to the Dillards'.

At 8.30 Belle Dillard, in an evening gown, had got into a taxi and been driven up West End Avenue. (Arnesson

had come out of the house with her and helped her into the taxicab, but had immediately returned indoors.)

At 9.15 Professor Dillard and Drukker had left the Dillard house and walked slowly toward Riverside Drive. They had crossed the Drive at 74th Street, and turned up the bridle path.

At 9.30 Pardee had come out of the Dillard house, walked down to the Drive, and turned up-town.

At a little after 10.00 Professor Dillard had returned to his house alone, recrossing the Drive at 74th Street.

At 10.20 Pardee had returned home, coming from the same direction he had taken when going out.

Belle Dillard had been brought home at 12.30 in a limousine filled with young people.

Hennessey was interrogated next; but his evidence merely substantiated Snitkin's. No one had approached the Dillard house from the direction of West End Avenue; and nothing of a suspicious nature had happened.

Markham then turned his attention to Emery, who reported that, according to Santos whom he had relieved at six, Pardee had spent the early part of the afternoon at the Manhattan Chess Club and had returned home at about four o'clock.

"Then, like Snitkin and Hennessey said," Emery continued, "he went to the Dillards' at half past six, and stayed till half past nine. When he came out I followed, keeping half a block or so behind him. He walked up the Drive to 79th Street, crossed to the upper park, and walked round the big grass bowl, past the rocks, and on up toward the Yacht Club. . . ."

"Did he take the path where Sprigg was shot?" Vance asked.

"He had to. There ain't any other path up that way unless you walk along the Drive."

"How far did he go?"

"The fact is, he stopped right about where Sprigg was bumped off. Then he came back the same way he'd gone and turned into the little park with the playground on the south side of 79th Street. He went slowly down the walk under the trees along the bridle path; and as he passed along the top of the wall under the drinking fountain, who should he run into but the old man and the hunchback, resting up against the ledge and talking. . . ."

"You say he met Professor Dillard and Drukker at the very spot where Drukker fell over the wall?" Markham leaned forward hopefully.

"Yes, sir. Pardee stopped to visit with them; and I naturally kept on going. As I passed 'em I heard the hunchback say: 'Why ain't you practising chess this evening?' And it sounded to me like he was sore at Pardee for stopping, and was hinting that he wasn't wanted. Anyhow, I ambled along the wall till I got to 74th Street where there was a couple of trees to hide under. . . ."

"How well could you see Pardee and Drukker after you'd reached 74th Street?" interrupted Markham.

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I couldn't see 'em at all. It was getting pretty misty about that time, and there isn't any lamp-post at that part of he walk where they were confabulating. But I figured Pardee would be along pretty soon, so I waited for him."

"This must have been well on toward ten o'clock."

"About a quarter of, I should say, sir."

"Were there any people on the walk at that time?"

"I didn't see anybody. The fog musta driven 'em indoors—it wasn't no warm balmy evening. And it was on account of there being nobody around that I went as far ahead as I did. Pardee's nobody's fool, and I'd already caught him looking at me once or twice as though he suspected I was tailing him."

"How long was it before you picked him up again?"

Emery shifted his position.

"My figuring wasn't so good last night," he confessed, with a weak grin. "Pardee musta gone back the way he came and recrossed the Drive at 79th Street; for a half-hour or so later I saw him heading home in front of the apartment-house light on the corner of 75th Street."

"But," interposed Vance, "if you were at the 74th-Street entrance to the park until a quarter past ten you must have seen Professor Dillard pass you. He returned home about ten o'clock by that route."

"Sure, I saw him. I'd been waiting for Pardee about twenty minutes when the professor came strolling along all alone, crossed the Drive, and went home. I naturally thought Pardee and the hunchback were still gabbing,—that's why I took it easy and didn't go back to check up."

"Then, as I understand, about fifteen minutes after Professor Dillard passed you, you saw Pardee returning home from the opposite direction along the Drive."

"That's right, sir. And, of course, I took up my post again on 75th Street."

"You realize, Emery," said Markham gravely, "that it was during the time you waited at 74th Street that Drukker fell over the wall."

"Yes, sir. But you're not blaming me, are you? Watching a man on a foggy night on an open path when there ain't anybody around to screen you, is no easy job. You gotta take a few chances and do a little figuring if you don't want to get spotted."

"I realize your difficulty," Markham told him; "and I'm not criticizing you."

The Sergeant dismissed the three detectives gruffly. He was obviously dissatisfied with their reports.

"The farther we go," he complained, "the more gummed up this case gets."

"*Sursum corda*, Sergeant," Vance exhorted him. "Let not dark despair o'ercome you. When we have Pardee's and the Professor's testimony as to what took place while Emery was watchfully waiting beneath the trees at 74th Street, we may be able to fit some very interestin' bits together."

As he spoke Belle Dillard entered the front hall from the rear of the house. She saw us in the drawing-room and came in at once.

"Where's Lady Mae?" she asked in a troubled voice. "I was here an hour ago, and Grete told me she was out. And she's not in her room now."

Vance rose and gave her his chair.

"Mrs. Drukker died last night of heart failure. When you were here earlier Mrs. Menzel was afraid to let you go up-stairs."

The girl sat very quiet for some time. Presently the tears welled to her eyes.

"Perhaps she heard of Adolph's terrible accident."

"Possibly. But it's not quite clear what happened here last night. Doctor Barstead thinks Mrs. Drukker died at about ten o'clock."

"Almost the same time Adolph died," she murmured. "It seems too terrible. . . . Pyne told me of the accident when I came down to breakfast this morning,—every one in the quarter was talking about it,—and I came over at once to be with Lady Mae. But Grete said she had gone out, and I didn't know what to think. There's something very strange about Adolph's death. . . ."

"What do you mean by that, Miss Dillard?" Vance stood by the window watching her covertly.

"I—don't know—what I mean," she answered brokenly. "But only yesterday afternoon Lady Mae spoke to me about Adolph and the—wall. . . ."

"Oh, did she, now?" Vance's tone was more indolent than usual, but every nerve in his body was, I knew, vigilantly alert.

"On my way to the tennis courts," the girl went on, in a low, hushed voice, "I walked with Lady Mae along the bridle path above the playground—she often went there to watch Adolph playing with the children,—and we stood for a long time leaning over the stone balustrade of the wall. A group of children were gathered around Adolph: he had a toy aeroplane and was showing them how to fly it. And the children seemed to regard him as one of themselves; they didn't look upon him as a grown-up. Lady Mae was very happy and proud about it. She watched him with shining eyes, and then she said to me: 'They're not afraid of him, Belle, because he's a hunchback. They call him Humpty Dumpty—he's their old friend of the story-book. My poor Humpty

Dumpty! It was all my fault for letting him fall when he was little.' . . ." The girl's voice faltered, and she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"So she mentioned to you that the children called Drukker Humpty Dumpty." Vance reached slowly in his pocket for his cigarette-case.

She nodded, and a moment later lifted her head as if forcing herself to face something she dreaded.

"Yes! And that's what was so strange; for after a little while she shuddered and drew back from the wall. I asked her what was the matter, and she said in a terrified voice: 'Suppose, Belle—suppose that Adolph should ever fall off of this wall—the way the real Humpty Dumpty did!' I was almost afraid myself; but I forced a smile, and told her she was foolish. It didn't do any good, though. She shook her head and gave me a look that sent a chill through me. 'I'm not foolish,' she said. 'Wasn't Cock Robin killed with a bow and arrow, and wasn't Johnny Sprig shot with a little gun—*right here in New York?*' " The girl turned a frightened gaze upon us. "And it *did* happen, didn't it—just as she foresaw?"

"Yes, it happened," Vance nodded. "But we mustn't be mystical about it. Mrs. Drukker's imagination was abnormal. All manner of wild conjectures went through her tortured mind; and with these two other Mother-Goose deaths so vivid in her memory, it's not remarkable that she should have turned the children's sobriquet for her son into a tragic speculation of that kind. That he should actually have been killed in the manner she feared is nothing more than a coincidence. . . ."

He paused and drew deeply on his cigarette.

"I say, Miss Dillard," he asked negligently; "did

you, by any chance, repeat your conversation with Mrs. Drukker to any one yesterday?"

She regarded him with some surprise before answering.

"I mentioned it at dinner last night. It worried me all the afternoon, and—somehow—I didn't want to keep it to myself."

"Were any comments made about it?"

"Uncle told me I shouldn't spend so much time with Lady Mae—that she was unhealthily morbid. He said the situation was very tragic, but that there was no need for me to share Lady Mae's suffering. Mr. Pardee agreed with uncle. He was very sympathetic, and asked if something could not be done to help Lady Mae's mental condition."

"And Mr. Arnesson?"

"Oh, Sigurd never takes anything seriously,—I hate his attitude sometimes. He laughed as though it was a joke; and all he said was: 'It would be a shame if Adolph took his tumble before he got his new quantum problem worked out.' "

"Is Mr. Arnesson at home now, by the by?" asked Vance. "We want to ask him about the necess'ry arrangements in regard to the Drukkers."

"He went to the university early this morning; but he'll be back before lunch. He 'll attend to everything, I am sure. We were about the only friends Lady Mae and Adolph had. I'll take charge in the meantime and see that Grete gets the house in order."

A few minutes later we left her and went to interview Professor Dillard.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RED NOTE-BOOK

(Saturday, April 16; noon)

The professor was plainly perturbed when we entered the library that noon. He sat in an easy chair with his back to the window, a glass of his precious port on the table beside him.

"I've been expecting you, Markham," he said, before we had time to speak. "There's no need to dissemble. Drukker's death was no accident. I'll admit I felt inclined to discount the insane implications arising from the deaths of Robin and Sprigg; but the moment Pyne related the circumstances of Drukker's fall I realized that there was a definite design behind these deaths: the probabilities of their being accidental would be incalculable. You know it, as well as I; otherwise you wouldn't be here."

"Very true." Markham had seated himself facing the professor. "We're confronted by a terrific problem. Moreover, Mrs. Drukker died of shock last night at almost the same time her son was killed."

"That, at least," returned the old man after a pause, "may be regarded as a blessing. It's better she didn't survive him—her mind unquestionably would have collapsed." He looked up. "In what way can I help?"

"You were probably the last person, with the ex-

ception of the actual murderer, to see Drukker alive; and we would like to know everything you can tell us of what took place last night."

Professor Dillard nodded.

"Drukker came here after dinner—about eight, I should say. Pardee had dined with us; and Drukker was annoyed at finding him here—in fact, he was openly hostile. Arnesson twitted him good-naturedly about his irascibility—which only made him more irritable; and, knowing that Drukker was anxious to thrash out a problem with me, I finally suggested that he and I stroll down to the park. . . ."

"You were not gone very long," suggested Markham.

"No. An unfortunate episode occurred. We walked up the bridle path to almost the exact spot where, I understand, the poor fellow was killed. We had been there for perhaps half an hour, leaning against the stone balustrade of the wall, when Pardee walked up. He stopped to speak to us, but Drukker was so antagonistic in his remarks that, after a few minutes, Pardee turned and walked away in the direction he had come. Drukker was very much upset, and I suggested we postpone the discussion. Furthermore, a damp mist had fallen, and I was beginning to get some twinges in my foot. Drukker straightway became morose, and said he didn't care to go indoors just yet. So I left him alone by the wall, and came home."

"Did you mention the episode to Arnesson?"

"I didn't see Sigurd after I got back. I imagine he'd gone to bed."

Later as we rose to take our leave, Vance asked

casually: "Can you tell us where the key to the alley door is kept?"

"I know nothing about it, sir," the professor replied irritably, but added in a more equable tone: "However, as I remember, it used to hang on a nail by the archery-room door."

From Professor Dillard we went straight to Pardee, and were received at once in his study. His manner was rigid and detached, and even after we had seated ourselves he remained standing by the window, staring at us with unfriendly eyes.

"Do you know, Mr. Pardee," asked Markham, "that Mr. Drukker fell from the wall in the park at ten o'clock last night—shortly after you stopped and spoke to him?"

"I heard of the accident this morning." The man's pallor became more noticeable, and he toyed nervously with his watch chain. "It's very unfortunate." His eyes rested vacantly for a while on Markham. "Have you asked Professor Dillard about it? He was with Drukker——"

"Yes, yes; we've just come from him," interrupted Vance. "He said there was a ruffled atmosphere between you and Mr. Drukker last night."

Pardee slowly walked to the desk and sat down stiffly.

"Drukker was displeased for some reason to find me at the Dillards' when he came over after dinner. He hadn't the good taste to hide his displeasure, and created a somewhat embarrassing situation. But, knowing him as I did, I tried to pass the matter off. Soon, however, Professor Dillard took him out for a walk."

"You didn't remain long afterward," observed Vance indolently.

"No—about a quarter of an hour. Arnesson was tired and wanted to turn in, so I went for a walk myself. On my return I took the bridle path instead of the Drive, and came on Professor Dillard and Drukker standing by the wall talking. Not wishing to appear rude, I stopped for a moment. But Drukker was in a beastly mood and made several sneering remarks. I turned and walked back to 79th Street, crossed the Drive, and came home."

"I say; didn't you loiter a bit by the wayside?"

"I sat down near the 79th-Street entrance and smoked a cigarette."

For nearly half an hour Markham and Vance interrogated Pardee, but nothing more could be learned from him. As we came out into the street Arnesson hailed us from the front porch of the Dillard house and stalked forward to meet us.

"Just heard the sad news. Got home from the university a little while ago, and the professor told me you'd gone to rag Pardee. Learn anything?" Without waiting for an answer he ran on: "Frightful mess. I understand the entire Drukker family is wiped out. Well, well. And more story-book mumbo-jumbo to boot. . . . Any clews?"

"Ariadne has not yet favored us," responded Vance. "Are you an ambassador from Crete?"

"One never knows. Bring out your questionnaire."

Vance had led the way toward the wall gate, and we now stepped down on the range.

"We'll repair to the Drukker house first," he said. "There'll be a number of things to settle. I suppose

you'll look after Drukker's affairs and the funeral arrangements."

Arnesson made a grimace.

"Elected! I refuse, however, to attend the funeral. Obscene spectacles, funerals. But Belle and I will see to everything. Lady Mae probably left a will. We'll have to find it. Now, where do women generally hide their wills? . . ."

Vance halted by the Dillards' basement door and stepped into the archery-room. After glancing along the door's moulding he rejoined us on the range.

"The alley key isn't there.—By the by, what do you know about it, Mr. Arnesson?"

"You mean the key to yon wooden door in the fence? . . . Haven't an idea on the subject. Never use the alley myself—much simpler going out the front door. No one uses it, as far as I know. Belle locked it up years ago: thought some one might sneak in off the Drive and get an arrow in the eye. I told her, let 'em get popped—serve 'em right for being interested in archery."

We entered the Drukker house by the rear door. Belle Dillard and Mrs. Menzel were busy in the kitchen.

"Hallo, sis," Arnesson greeted the girl. His cynical manner had been dropped. "Hard lines for a young 'un like you. You'd better run home now. I'll assume command." And taking her arm in a jocularly paternal fashion, he led her to the door.

She hesitated and looked back at Vance.

"Mr. Arnesson is right," he nodded. "We'll carry on for the present.—But just one question before you go. Did you always keep the key to the alley door hanging in the archery-room?"

"Yes—always. Why? Isn't it there now?"

It was Arnesson who answered, with burlesque irony.

"Gone! Disappeared!—Most tragic. Some eccentric key-collector has evidently been snooping around." When the girl had left us, he cocked an eye at Vance. "What, in the name of all that's unholy, has a rusty key to do with the case?"

"Perhaps nothing," said Vance carelessly. "Let's go to the drawin'-room. It's more comfortable there." He led the way down the hall. "We want you to tell us what you can about last night."

Arnesson took an easy chair by the front window, and drew out his pipe.

"Last night, eh? . . . Well, Pardee came to dinner—it's a sort of habit with him on Fridays. Then Drukker, in the throes of quantum speculation, dropped in to pump the professor; and Pardee's presence galled him. Showed his feelings too, by Gad! No control. The professor broke up the *contretemps* by taking Drukker for an airing. Pardee moped for fifteen minutes or so, while I tried to keep awake. Then he had the goodness to depart. I looked over a few test papers . . . and so to bed." He lighted his pipe. "How does that thrilling recital explain the end of poor Drukker?"

"It doesn't," said Vance. "But it's not without interest.—Did you hear Professor Dillard when he returned home?"

"Hear him?" Arnesson chuckled. "When he hobbles about with his gouty foot, thumping his stick down and shaking the banisters, there's no mistaking his arrival on the scene. Fact is, he was unusually noisy last night."

"Offhand, what do you make of these new developments?" asked Vance, after a short pause.

"I'm somewhat foggy as to the details. The professor was not exactly phosphorescent. Sketchy, in fact. Drukker fell from the wall, like Humpty Dumpty, round ten o'clock, and was found this morning—that's all plain. But under what conditions did Lady Mae succumb to shock? Who, or what, shocked her? And how?"

"The murderer took Drukker's key and came here immediately after the crime. Mrs. Drukker caught him in her son's room. There was a scene, according to the cook, who listened from the head of the stairs; and during it Mrs. Drukker died from dilatation of the heart."

"Thereby relieving the gentleman of the bother of killing her."

"That seems clear enough," agreed Vance. "But the reason for the murderer's visit here is not so lucid. Can you suggest an explanation?"

Arnesson puffed thoughtfully on his pipe.

"Incomprehensible," he muttered at length. "Drukker had no valuables, or no compromising documents. Straightforward sort of cuss—not the kind to mix in any dirty business. . . . No possible reason for any one prowling about his room."

Vance lay back and appeared to relax.

"What was this quantum theory Drukker was working on?"

"Ha! Big thing!" Arnesson became animated. "He was on the path of reconciling the Einstein-Bohr theory of radiation with the facts of interference, and of overcoming the inconsistencies inherent

in Einstein's hypothesis. His research had already led him to an abandonment of causal space-time coordination of atomic phenomena, and to its replacement by a statistical description.* . . . Would have revolutionized physics—made him famous. Shame he was told off before he'd put his data in shape."

"Do you happen to know where Drukker kept the records of these computations?"

"In a loose-leaf note-book—all tabulated and indexed. Methodical and neat about everything. Even his chirography was like copperplate."

"You know, then, what the note-book looked like?"

"I ought to. He showed it to me often enough. Red limp-leather cover—thin yellow pages—two or three clips on every sheet holding notations—his name gold-stamped in large letters on the binding. . . . Poor devil! *Sic transit.* . . ."

"Where would this note-book be now?"

"One of two places—either in the drawer of his desk in the study or else in the escritoire in his bedroom. In the daytime, of course, he worked in the study; but he fussed day and night when wrapped up in a problem. Kept an escritoire in his bedroom, where he put his current records when he retired, in case he got an inspiration to monkey with 'em during the night. Then, in the morning, back they'd go to the study. Regular machine for system."

Vance had been gazing lazily out of the window as Arnesson rambled on. The impression he gave was that he had scarcely heard the description of Druk-

* An important step toward the solution of these complex problems was taken a few years later by the de Broglie-Schrödinger theory as laid down in de Broglie's "Ondes et Mouvements" and Schrödinger's "Abhandlungen zur Wellenmechanik."

ker's habits; but presently he turned and fixed Arnesson with a languid look.

"I say," he drawled; "would you mind toddling up-stairs and fetching Drukker's note-book? Look in both the study and the bedroom."

I thought I noticed an almost imperceptible hesitation on Arnesson's part; but straightway he rose.

"Good idea. Too valuable a document to be left lying round." And he strode from the room.

Markham began pacing the floor, and Heath revealed his uneasiness by puffing more energetically on his cigar. There was a tense atmosphere in the little drawing-room as we waited for Arnesson's return. Each of us was in a state of expectancy, though just what we hoped for or feared would have been difficult to define.

In less than ten minutes Arnesson reappeared at the door. He shrugged his shoulders and held out empty hands.

"Gone!" he announced. "Looked in every likely place—couldn't find it." He threw himself into a chair and relighted his pipe. "Can't understand it. . . . Perhaps he hid it."

"Perhaps," murmured Vance.

CHAPTER XX

THE NEMESIS

(Saturday, April 16; 1 p. m.)

It was past one o'clock, and Markham, Vance and I rode to the Stuyvesant Club. Heath remained at the Drukker house to carry on the routine work, to draw up his report, and to deal with the reporters who would be swarming there shortly.

Markham was booked for a conference with the Police Commissioner at three o'clock; and after lunch Vance and I walked to Stieglitz's Intimate Gallery and spent an hour at an exhibition of Georgia O'Keeffe's floral abstractions. Later we dropped in at Aeolian Hall and sat through Debussy's G-minor quartette. There were some Cézanne water-colors at the Montross Galleries; but by the time we had pushed our way through the late-afternoon traffic of Fifth Avenue the light had begun to fail, and Vance ordered the chauffeur to the Stuyvesant Club, where we joined Markham for tea.

"I feel so youthful, so simple, so innocent," Vance complained lugubriously. "So many things are happenin', and they're bein' manipulated so ingeniously that I can't grasp 'em. It's very disconcertin', very confusin'. I don't like it—I don't at all like it. Most wearin'." He sighed drearily and sipped his tea.

"Your sorrows leave me cold," retorted Markham. "You've probably spent the afternoon inspecting

arquebuses and petronels at the Metropolitan Museum. If you'd had to go through what I've suffered——"

"Now, don't be cross," Vance rebuked him. "There's far too much emotion in the world. Passion is not going to solve this case. Cerebration is our only hope. Let us be calm and thoughtful." His mood became serious. "Markham, this comes very near being the perfect crime. Like one of Morphy's great chess combinations, it has been calculated a score of moves ahead. There are no clews; and even if there were, they'd probably point in the wrong direction. And yet . . . and yet there's something that's trying to break through. I feel it: sheer intuition—that is to say, nerves. There's an inarticulate voice that wants to speak, and can't. A dozen times I've sensed the presence of some struggling force, like an invisible ghost trying to make contact without revealing its identity."

Markham gave an exasperated sigh.

"Very helpful. Do you advise calling in a medium?"

"There's something we've overlooked," Vance went on, disregarding the sarcasm. "The case is a cipher, and the key-word is somewhere before us, but we don't recognize it. 'Pon my soul, it's dashed annoyin'. . . . Let's be orderly. Neatness—that's our desideratum. First, Robin is killed. Next, Sprigg is shot. Then Mrs. Drukker is frightened with a black bishop. After that, Drukker is shoved over a wall. Makin' four distinct episodes in the murderer's extravaganza. Three of 'em were carefully planned. One—the leaving of the bishop at Mrs.

Drukker's door—was forced on the murderer, and was therefore decided on without preparation. . . ."

"Clarify your reasoning on that point."

"Oh, my dear fellow! The conveyor of the black bishop was obviously acting in self-defence. An unexpected danger developed along his line of campaign, and he took this means of averting it. Just before Robin's death Drukker departed from the archery-room and installed himself in the arbor of the yard, where he could look into the archery-room through the rear window. A little later he saw some one in the room talking to Robin. He returned to his house, and at that moment Robin's body was thrown on the range. Mrs. Drukker saw it, and at the same time she probably saw Drukker. She screamed—very natural, what? Drukker heard the scream, and told us of it later in an effort to establish an alibi for himself after we'd informed him that Robin had been killed. Thus the murderer learned that Mrs. Drukker had seen something—how much, he didn't know. But he wasn't taking any chances. He went to her room at midnight to silence her, and took the bishop to leave beside her body as a signature. But he found the door locked, and left the bishop outside, by way of warning her to say nothing on pain of death. He didn't know that the poor woman suspected her own son."

"But why didn't Drukker tell us whom he saw in the archery-room with Robin?"

"We can only assume that the person was some one whom he couldn't conceive of as being guilty. And I'm inclined to believe he mentioned the fact to this person and thus sealed his own doom."

"Assuming the correctness of your theory, where does it lead us?"

"To the one episode that wasn't elaborately prepared in advance. And when there has been no preparation for a covert act there is pretty sure to be a weakness in one or more of the details.—Now, please note that at the time of each of the three murders any one of the various persons in the drama could have been present. No one had an alibi. That, of course, was cleverly calculated: the murderer chose an hour when all of the actors were, so to speak, waiting in the wings. But that midnight visit! Ah! That was a different matter. There was no time to work out a perfect set of circumstances,—the menace was too immediate. And what was the result? Drukker and Professor Dillard were, apparently, the only persons on hand at midnight. Arnesson and Belle Dillard were supping at the Plaza and didn't return home until half past twelve. Pardee was hornlocked with Rubinstein over a chess-board from eleven to one. Drukker is now of course eliminated. . . . What's the answer?"

"I could remind you," returned Markham irritably, "that the alibis of the others have not been thoroughly checked."

"Well, well, so you could." Vance lay back indolently and sent a long regular series of smoke-rings toward the ceiling. Suddenly his body tensed, and with meticulous care he leaned over and put out his cigarette. Then he glanced at his watch and got to his feet. He fixed Markham with a quizzical look.

"*Allons, mon vieux.* It's not yet six. Here's where Arnesson makes himself useful."

"What now?" expostulated Markham.

"Your own suggestion," Vance replied, taking him by the arm and leading him toward the door. "We're going to check Pardee's alibi."

Half an hour later we were seated with the professor and Arnesson in the Dillard library.

"We've come on a somewhat unusual errand," explained Vance; "but it may have a vital bearing on our investigation." He took out his wallet, and unfolded a sheet of paper. "Here's a document, Mr. Arnesson, I wish you'd glance over. It's a copy of the official scoresheet of the chess game between Pardee and Rubinstein. Very interestin'. I've toyed with it a bit, but I'd like your expert analysis of it. The first part of the game is usual enough, but the play after the adjournment rather appeals to me."

Arnesson took the paper and studied it with cynical amusement.

"Aha! The inglorious record of Pardee's Waterloo, eh?"

"What's the meaning of this, Markham?" asked Professor Dillard contemptuously. "Do you hope to run a murderer to earth by dilly-dallying over a chess game?"

"Mr. Vance hoped something could be learned from it."

"Fiddlesticks!" The professor poured himself another glass of port and, opening a book, ignored us completely.

Arnesson was absorbed in the notations of the chess score.

"Something a bit queer here," he muttered. "The time's askew. Let's see. . . . The scoresheet shows

that, up to the time of adjournment, White—that is, Pardee—had played one hour and forty-five minutes, and Black, or Rubinstein, one hour and fifty-eight minutes. So far, so good. Thirty moves. Quite in order. But the time at the end of the game, when Pardee resigned, totals two hours and thirty minutes for White, and three hours and thirty-two minutes for Black—which means that, during the second session of the game, White consumed only forty-five minutes whereas Black used up one hour and thirty-four minutes."

Vance nodded.

"Exactly. There were two hours and nineteen minutes of play beginning at 11 p. m., which carried the game to 1.19 a. m. And Rubinstein's moves during that time took forty-nine minutes longer than Pardee's.—Can you make out what happened?"

Arnesson pursed his lips and squinted at the notations.

"It's not clear. I'd need time."

"Suppose," Vance suggested, "we set up the game in the adjourned position and play it through. I'd like your opinion on the tactics."

Arnesson rose jerkily and went to the little chess table in the corner.

"Good idea." He emptied the men from the box. "Let's see now. . . . Oho! A black bishop is missing. When do I get it back, by the way?" He gave Vance a plaintive leer. "Never mind. We don't need it here. One black bishop was swapped." And he proceeded to arrange the men to accord with the position of the game at the time of adjournment. Then he sat down and studied the set-up.

"It doesn't strike me as a particularly unfavorable position for Pardee," ventured Vance.

"Me either. Can't see why he lost the game. Looks drawish to me." After a moment Arnesson referred to the scoresheet. "We'll run through the play and find out where the trouble lay." He made half a dozen moves; then, after several minutes' study, gave a grunt. "Ha! This is rather deep stuff of Rubinstein's. Amazing combination he began working up here. Subtle, by Gad! As I know Rubinstein, it took him a long time to figure it out. Slow, plodding chap."

"It's possible, isn't it," suggested Vance, "that the working out of that combination explains the discrepancy in time between Black and White?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. Rubinstein must have been in good form not to have made the discrepancy greater. Planning the combination took him all of forty-five minutes—or I'm a duffer."

"At what hour, would you say," asked Vance carelessly, "did Rubinstein use up that forty-five minutes?"

"Well, let's see. The play began at eleven: six moves before the combination started. . . . Oh, say, somewhere between half past eleven and half past twelve. . . . Yes, just about. Thirty moves before the adjournment: six moves beginning at eleven—that makes thirty-six: then on the forty-fourth move Rubinstein moved his pawn to Bishop-7-check, and Pardee resigned. . . . Yes—the working out of the combination was between eleven-thirty and twelve-thirty."

Vance regarded the men on the board, which were

now in the position they had occupied at the time of Pardee's resignation.*

"Out of curiosity," he said quietly, "I played the game through to the checkmate the other night.—I say, Mr. Arnesson; would you mind doin' the same. I could bear to hear your comment on it."

Arnesson studied the position closely for a few minutes. Then he turned his head slowly and lifted his eyes to Vance. A sardonic grin overspread his face.

"I grasp the point. Gad! What a situation! Five moves for Black to win through. And an almost unheard-of finale in chess. Can't recall a similar instance. The last move would be Bishop to Knight-7, mating. In other words, Pardee was beaten by the black bishop! Incredible!"†

Professor Dillard put down his book.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, joining us at the chess table. "Pardee was defeated by the bishop?" He gave Vance a shrewd, admiring look. "You evidently had good reason, sir, for investigating that chess game. Pray overlook an old man's temper." He stood gazing down at the board with a sad, puzzled expression.

Markham was frowning with deep perplexity.

"You say it's unusual for a bishop alone to mate?" he asked Arnesson.

* For the benefit of the expert chess-player who may be academically interested I append the exact position of the game when Pardee resigned:—WHITE: King at QKtsq; Rook at QB8; Pawns at QR2 and Q2. BLACK: King at Q5; Knight at QKt5; Bishop at QR6; Pawns at QKt7 and QB7.

† The final five unplayed moves for Black to mate, as I later obtained them from Vance, were:—*45.* RxP; KtxR. *46.* KxKt; P—Kt8 (Queen). *47.* KxQ; K—Q6. *48.* K—Rsq; K—B7. *49.* P—Q3; B—Kt7 mate.

"Never happens—almost unique situation. And that it should happen to Pardee of all people! Incomprehensible!" He gave a short ironic laugh. "Inclines one to believe in a nemesis. You know, the bishop has been Pardee's *bête noir* for twenty years—it's ruined his life. Poor beggar! The black bishop is the symbol of his sorrow. Fate, by Gad! It's the one chessman that defeated the Pardee gambit. Bishop-to-Knight-5 always broke up his calculations—disqualified his pet theory—made a hissing and a mocking of his life's work. And now, with a chance to break even with the great Rubinstein, the bishop crops up again and drives him back into obscurity."

A few minutes later we took our departure and walked to West End Avenue, where we hailed a taxicab.

"It's no wonder, Vance," commented Markham, as we rode down-town, "that Pardee went white the other afternoon when you mentioned the black bishop's being at large at midnight. He probably thought you were deliberately insulting him—throwing his life's failure in his face."

"Perhaps. . . ." Vance gazed dreamily out into the gathering shadows. "Dashed queer about the bishop being his incubus all these years. Such recurring discouragements affect the strongest minds sometimes; create a desire for revenge on the world, with the cause of one's failure exalted to an Astræan symbol."

"It's difficult to picture Pardee in a vindictive rôle," objected Markham. Then, after a moment: "What was your point about the discrepancy in time

between Pardee's and Rubinstein's playing? Suppose Rubinstein did take forty-five minutes or so to work out his combination. The game wasn't over until after one. I don't see that your visit to Arnesson put us ahead in any way."

"That's because you're unacquainted with the habits of chess players. In a clock game of that kind no player sits at the table all the time his opponent is figuring out moves. He walks about, stretches his muscles, takes the air, ogles the ladies, imbibes ice-water, and even indulges in food. At the Manhattan Square Masters Tournament last year there were four tables, and it was a common sight to see as many as three empty chairs at one time. Pardee's a nervous type. He wouldn't sit through Rubinstein's protracted mental speculations."

Vance lighted a cigarette slowly.

"Markham, Arnesson's analysis of that game reveals the fact that Pardee had three-quarters of an hour to himself around midnight."

CHAPTER XXI

MATHEMATICS AND MURDER

(Saturday, April 16; 8.30 p. m.)

Little was said about the case during dinner, but when we had settled ourselves in a secluded corner of the club lounge-room Markham again broached the subject.

"I can't see," he said, "that finding a loophole in Pardee's alibi helps us very much. It merely complicates an already intolerable situation."

"Yes," sighed Vance. "A sad and depressin' world. Each step appears to tangle us a little more. And the amazin' part of it is, the truth is staring us in the face; only, we can't see it."

"There's no evidence pointing to any one. There's not even a suspect against whose possible culpability reason doesn't revolt."

"I wouldn't say that, don't y' know. It's a mathematician's crime; and the landscape has been fairly cluttered with mathematicians."

Throughout the entire investigation no one had been indicated by name as the possible murderer. Yet each of us realized in his own heart that one of the persons with whom we had talked was guilty; and so hideous was this knowledge that we instinctively shrank from admitting it. From the first we had cloaked our true thoughts and fears with generalities.

"A mathematician's crime?" repeated Markham.

"The case strikes me as a series of senseless acts committed by a maniac running amuck."

Vance shook his head.

"Our criminal is supersane, Markham. And his acts are not senseless: they're hideously logical and precise. True, they have been conceived with a grim and terrible humor, with a tremendously cynical attitude; but within themselves they are exact and rational."

Markham regarded Vance thoughtfully.

"How can you reconcile these Mother-Goose crimes with the mathematical mind?" he asked. "In what way can they be regarded as logical? To me they're nightmares, unrelated to sanity."

Vance settled himself deeper in his chair, and smoked for several minutes. Then he began an analysis of the case, which not only clarified the seeming madness of the crimes themselves, but brought all the events and the characters into a uniform focus. The accuracy of this analysis was brought home to us with tragic and overwhelming force before many days had passed.*

"In order to understand these crimes," he began, "we must consider the stock-in-trade of the mathematician, for all his speculations and computations tend to emphasize the relative insignificance of this planet and the unimportance of human life.—Regard, first, the mere scope of the mathematician's field. On the one hand he attempts to measure in-

* I am obviously unable to set down Vance's exact words, despite the completeness of my notes; but I sent him a proof of the following passages with a request that he revise and edit them; so that, as they now stand, they represent an accurate paraphrase of his analysis of the psychological factors of the Bishop murders.

finite space in terms of parsecs and light-years, and, on the other, to measure the electron which is so infinitely small that he has to invent the Rutherford unit—a millionth of a millimicron. His vision is one of transcendental perspectives, in which this earth and its people sink almost to the vanishing point. Some of the stars—such as Arcturus, Canopus and Betelgeuse—which he regards merely as minute and insignificant units, are many times more massive than our entire solar system. Shapleigh's estimate of the diameter of the Milky Way is 300,000 light-years; yet we must place 10,000 Milky Ways together to get the diameter of the universe—which gives us a cubical content a thousand milliard times greater than the scope of astronomical observation. Or, to put it relatively in terms of mass:—the sun's weight is 324,000 times greater than the weight of the earth; and the weight of the universe is postulated as that of a trillion*—a milliard times a milliard—suns. . . . Is it any wonder that workers in such stupendous magnitudes should sometimes lose all sense of earthly proportions?"

Vance made an insignificant gesture.

"But these are element'ry figures—the every-day facts of journeyman calculators. The higher mathematician goes vastly further. He deals in abstruse and apparently contradict'ry speculations which the average mind can not even grasp. He lives in a realm where time, as we know it, is without meaning save as a fiction of the brain, and becomes a fourth

* Vance was here using the English connotation of "trillion," which is the third power of a million, as opposed to the American and French system of numeration which regards a trillion as a mere million millions.

co-ordinate of three-dimensional space; where distance also is meaningless except for neighboring points, since there are an infinite number of shortest routes between any two given points; where the language of cause and effect becomes merely a convenient shorthand for explanat'ry purposes; where straight lines are non-existent and insusceptible of definition; where mass grows infinitely great when it reaches the velocity of light; where space itself is characterized by curvatures; where there are lower and higher orders of infinities; where the law of gravitation is abolished as an acting force and replaced by a characteristic of space—a conception that says, in effect, that the apple does not fall because it is attracted by the earth, but because it follows a geodesic, or world-line. . . .

"In this realm of the modern mathematician, curves exist without tangents. Neither Newton nor Leibnitz nor Bernoulli even dreamed of a continuous curve without a tangent—that is, a continuous function without a differential co-efficient. Indeed, no one is able to picture such a contradiction,—it lies beyond the power of imagination. And yet it is a commonplace of modern mathematics to work with curves that have no tangents.—Moreover, *pi*—that old friend of our school-days, which we regarded as immutable—is no longer a constant; and the ratio between diameter and circumference now varies according to whether one is measuring a circle at rest or a rotating circle. . . . Do I bore you?"

"Unquestionably," retorted Markham. "But pray continue, provided your observations have an earthly direction."

Vance sighed and shook his head hopelessly, but at once became serious again.

"The concepts of modern mathematics project the individual out of the world of reality into a pure fiction of thought, and lead to what Einstein calls the most degenerate form of imagination—pathological individualism. Silberstein, for instance, argues the possibility of five- and six-dimensional space, and speculates on one's ability to see an event before it happens. The conclusions contingent on the conception of Flammarion's Lumen—a fictive person who travels faster than the velocity of light and is therefore able to experience time extending in a reverse direction—are in themselves enough to distort any natural and sane point of view.* But there is another conceptual Homunculus even weirder than Lumen from the standpoint of rational thinking. This hypothetical creature can traverse all worlds at once with infinite velocity, so that he is able to behold all human history at a glance. From Alpha Centauri he can see the earth as it was four years ago; from the Milky Way he can see it as it was 4,000 years ago; and he can also choose a point in space

* Lumen was invented by the French astronomer to prove the possibility of the reversal of time. With a speed of 250,000 miles per second, he was conceived as soaring into space at the end of the battle of Waterloo, and catching up all the light-rays that had left the battlefield. He attained a gradually increasing lead, until at the end of two days he was witnessing, not the end, but the beginning of the battle; and in the meantime he had been viewing events in reverse order. He had seen projectiles leaving the objects they had penetrated and returning to the cannon; dead men coming to life and arranging themselves in battle formation. Another hypothetical adventure of Lumen was jumping to the moon, turning about instantaneously, and seeing himself leaping from the moon to the earth backwards.

where he can witness the ice-age and the present day simultaneously! . . ."

Vance settled himself more deeply in his chair.

"Toying with the simple idea of infinity is enough to unhinge the average man's mind. But what of the well-known proposition of modern physics that we cannot take a straight and ever-advancing path into space without returning to our point of departure? This proposition holds, in brief, that we may go straight to Sirius and a million times further without changing direction, but we can never leave the universe: we at last return to our starting-point *from the opposite direction!* Would you say, Markham, that this idea is conducive to what we quaintly call normal thinking? But however paradoxical and incomprehensible it may seem, it is almost rudiment'ry when compared with other theorems advanced by mathematical physics. Consider, for example, what is called the problem of the twins. One of two twins starts to Arcturus at birth—that is, with accelerated motion in a gravitational field—and, on returning, discovers that he is much younger than his brother. If, on the other hand, we assume that the motion of the twins is Galilean and that they are therefore travelling with uniform motion relative to each other, then each twin will find that his brother is younger than himself! . . .

"These are not paradoxes of logic, Markham: they're only paradoxes of feeling. Mathematics accounts for them logically and scientifically.* The

* Vance requested me to mention here A. d'Abro's recent scholarly work, "The Evolution of Scientific Thought," in which there is an excellent discussion of the paradoxes associated with space-time.

point I'm trying to make is that things which seem inconsistent and even absurd to the lay mind, are commonplaces to the mathematical intelligence. A mathematico-physicist like Einstein announces that the diameter of space—of *space*, mind you—is 100,000,000 light-years, or 700 trillion miles; and considers the calculation abecedarian. When we ask what is beyond this diameter, the answer is: 'There is no beyond: these limitations include everything.' To wit, infinity is finite! Or, as the scientist would say, space is unbounded but finite.—Let your mind meditate on this idea for half an hour, Markham, and you'll have a sensation that you're going mad."

He paused to light a cigarette.

"Space and matter—that's the mathematician's speculative territ'ry. Eddington conceives matter as a characteristic of space—a bump in nothingness; whereas Weil conceives space as a characteristic of matter,—to him empty space is meaningless. Thus Kant's noumenon and phenomenon become interchangeable; and even philosophy loses all significance. But when we come to the mathematical conceptions of finite space all rational laws are abrogated. De Sitter's conception of the shape of space is globular, or spherical. Einstein's space is cylindrical; and matter approaches zero at the periphery, or 'border condition.' Weyl's space, based on Mach's mechanics, is saddle-shaped. . . . Now, what becomes of nature, of the world we live in, of human existence, when we weigh them against such conceptions? Eddington suggests the conclusion that there are no natural laws—namely, that nature is not amenable to the law of sufficient reason. Alas, poor Schopen-

hauer!* And Bertrand Russell sums up the inevitable results of modern physics by suggesting that matter is to be interpreted merely as a group of occurrences, and that matter itself need not be existent! . . . Do you see what it all leads to? If the world is non-causative and non-existent, what is a mere human life?—or the life of a nation?—or, for that matter, existence itself? . . ."

Vance looked up, and Markham nodded dubiously.

"So far I follow you, of course," he said. "But your point seems vague—not to say esoteric."

"Is it surprising," asked Vance, "that a man dealing in such colossal, incommensurable concepts, wherein the individuals of human society are infinitesimal, might in time lose all sense of relative values on earth, and come to have an enormous contempt for human life? The comparatively insignificant affairs of this world would then become mere petty intrusions on the macrocosmos of his mental consciousness. Inevitably such a man's attitude would become cynical. In his heart he would scoff at all human values, and sneer at the littleness of the visual things about him. Perhaps there would be a sadistic element in his attitude; for cynicism is a form of sadism. . . ."

"But deliberate, planned murder!" objected Markham.

"Consider the psychological aspects of the case. With the normal person, who takes his recreations daily, a balance is maintained between the conscious and the unconscious activities: the emotions, being constantly dispersed, are not allowed to accumulate.

* Vance's M. A. thesis, I recall, dealt with Schopenhauer's "Ueber die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde."

But with the abnormal person, who spends his entire time in intense mental concentration and who rigorously suppresses all his emotions, the loosening of the subconscious is apt to result in a violent manifestation. This long inhibition and protracted mental application, without recreation or outlet of any kind, causes an explosion which often assumes the form of deeds of unspeakable horror. No human being, however intellectual, can escape the results. The mathematician who repudiates nature's laws is nevertheless amenable to those laws. Indeed, his rapt absorption in hyperphysical problems merely increases the pressure of his denied emotions. And outraged nature, in order to maintain her balance, produces the most grotesque fulminations—reactions which, in their terrible humor and perverted gaiety, are the exact reverse of the grim seriousness of abstruse mathematical theories. The fact that Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge—both great mathematical physicists—became confirmed spiritists, constitutes a similar psychological phenomenon."

Vance took several deep inhalations on his cigarette.

"Markham, there's no escaping the fact: these fantastic and seemingly incredible murders were planned by a mathematician as forced outlets to a life of tense abstract speculation and emotional repression. They fulfil all the indicated requirements: they are neat and precise, beautifully worked out, with every minute factor fitting snugly in place. No loose ends, no remainders, apparently no motive. And aside from their highly imaginative precision, all their indications point unmistakably to an ab-

strusely conceptive intelligence on the loose—a devotee of pure science having his fling."

"But why their grisly humor?" asked Markham. "How do you reconcile the Mother-Goose phase of them with your theory?"

"The existence of inhibited impulses," explained Vance, "always produces a state favorable to humor. Dugas designates humor as a '*détente*'—a release from tension; and Bain, following Spencer, calls humor a relief from restraint. The most fertile field for a manifestation of humor lies in accumulated potential energy—what Freud calls *Besetzungsenergie*—which in time demands a free discharge. In these Mother-Goose crimes we have the mathematician reacting to the most fantastic of frivolous acts in order to balance his superserious logical speculations. It's as if he were saying cynically: 'Behold! This is the world that you take so seriously because you know nothing of the infinitely larger abstract world. Life on earth is a child's game—hardly important enough to make a joke about.' . . . And such an attitude would be wholly consistent with psychology; for after any great prolonged mental strain one's reactions will take the form of reversals—that is to say, the most serious and dignified will seek an outlet in the most childish games. Here, incidentally, you have the explanation for the practical joker with his sadistic instincts. . . .

"Moreover, all sadists have an infantile complex. And the child is totally amoral. A man, therefore, who experiences these infantile psychological reversals is beyond good and evil. Many modern mathematicians even hold that all convention, duty, mo-

rality, good, and the like, could not exist except for the fiction of free will. To them the science of ethics is a field haunted by conceptual ghosts; and they even arrive at the disintegrating doubt as to whether truth itself is not merely a figment of the imagination. . . . Add to these considerations the sense of earthly distortion and the contempt for human life which might easily result from the speculations of higher mathematics, and you have a perfect set of conditions for the type of crimes with which we are dealing."

When Vance had finished speaking Markham sat silent for a long time. Finally he moved restively.

"I can understand," he said, "how these crimes might fit almost any of the persons involved. But, on the basis of your argument, how do you account for the notes to the press?"

"Humor must be imparted," returned Vance. "'A jest's prosperity lies in the ear of him who hears it.' Also, the impulse toward exhibitionism enters into the present case."

"But the 'Bishop' alias?"

"Ah! That's a most vital point. The *raison d'être* of this terrible orgy of humor lies in that cryptic signature."

Markham turned slowly.

"Does the chess player and the astronomer fulfil the conditions of your theory as well as the mathematical physicist?"

"Yes," Vance replied. "Since the days of Philidor, Staunton and Kieseritzki, when chess was something of a fine art, the game has degenerated almost into an exact science; and during Capablanca's ré-

game it has become largely a matter of abstract mathematical speculation. Indeed, Maroczy, Doctor Lasker and Vidmar are all well-known mathematicians. . . . And the astronomer, who actually views the universe, may get an even more intense impression of the unimportance of this earth than the speculative physicist. Imagination runs riot through a telescope. The mere theory of existing life on distant planets tends to reduce earthly life to second'ry consideration. For hours after one has looked at Mars, for instance, and dallied with the notion that its inhabitants outnumber and surpass in intelligence our own population, one has difficulty in readjusting oneself to the petty affairs of life here on earth. Even a reading of Percival Lowell's romantic book* temporarily takes away from the imaginative person all consciousness of the significance of any single planet'ry existence."

There was a long silence. Then Markham asked:

"Why should Pardee have taken Arnesson's black bishop that night instead of one from the club where it would not have been missed?"

"We don't know enough of the motive to say. He may have taken it with some deliberate purpose in view.—But what evidence have you of his guilt? All the suspicions in the world would not permit you to take any step against him. Even if we knew indubitably who the murderer was, we'd be helpless. . . . I tell you, Markham, we're facing a shrewd brain—one that figures out every move, and calculates all the possibilities. Our only hope is to create our own evi-

* I do not know whether Vance was here referring to "Mars and Its Canals" or "Mars as the Abode of Life."

dence by finding a weakness in the murderer's combination."

"The first thing in the morning," declared Markham grimly, "I'm going to put Heath to work on Pardee's alibi that night. There'll be twenty men checking it up by noon, questioning every spectator at that chess game, and making a door-to-door canvass between the Manhattan Chess Club and the Drukker house. If we can find some one who actually saw Pardee in the vicinity of the Drukkers' around midnight, then we'll have a very suspicious piece of circumstantial evidence against him."

"Yes," agreed Vance; "that would give us a definite starting-point. Pardee would have considerable difficulty in explaining why he was six blocks away from the club during his set-to with Rubinstein at the exact hour that a black bishop was being left at Mrs. Drukker's door. . . . Yes, yes. By all means have Heath and his minions tackle the problem. It may lead us forward."

But the Sergeant was never called upon to check the alibi. Before nine o'clock on the following morning Markham called at Vance's house to inform him that Pardee had committed suicide.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HOUSE OF CARDS

(Sunday, April 17; 9 a. m.)

The astounding news of Pardee's death had a curiously disturbing effect on Vance. He stared at Markham unbelievingly. Then he rang hastily for Currie and ordered his clothes and a cup of coffee. There was an eager impatience in his movements as he dressed.

"My word, Markham!" he exclaimed. "This is most extr'ordin'ry. . . . How did you hear of it?"

"Professor Dillard phoned me at my apartment less than half an hour ago. Pardee killed himself in the archery-room of the Dillard home some time last night. Pyne discovered the body this morning and informed the professor. I relayed the news to Sergeant Heath, and then came here. In the circumstances I thought we ought to be on hand." Markham paused to light his cigar. "It looks as if the Bishop case was over. . . . Not an entirely satisfactory ending, but perhaps the best for every one concerned."

Vance made no immediate comment. He sipped his coffee abstractedly, and at length got up and took his hat and stick.

"Suicide. . . ," he murmured, as we went down the stairs. "Yes, that would be wholly consistent. But, as you say, unsatisfact'ry—dashed unsatisfact'ry. . . ."

We rode to the Dillard house, and were admitted by Pyne. Professor Dillard had no more than joined us in the drawing-room when the door-bell rang, and Heath, pugnacious and dynamic, bustled in.

"This'll clean things up, sir," he exulted to Markham, after the usual ritualistic handshake. "Those quiet birds . . . you never can tell. Yet, who'd've thought. . . ?"

"Oh, I say, Sergeant," Vance drawled; "let's not think. Much too wearin'. An open mind—arid like a desert—is indicated."

Professor Dillard led the way to the archery-room. The shades at all the windows were drawn, and the electric lights were still burning. I noticed, too, that the windows were closed.

"I left everything exactly as it was," explained the professor.

Markham walked to the large wicker centre-table. Pardee's body was slumped in a chair facing the range door. His head and shoulders had fallen forward over the table; and his right arm hung at his side, the fingers still clutching an automatic pistol. There was an ugly wound in his right temple; and on the table beneath his head was a pool of coagulated blood.

Our eyes rested but a moment on the body, for a startling and incongruous thing diverted our attention. The magazines on the table had been pushed aside, leaving an open space in front of the body; and in this cleared area rose a tall and beautifully constructed house of playing cards. Four arrows marked the boundaries of the yard, and matches had been laid side by side to represent the garden

walks. It was a reproduction that would have delighted a child's heart; and I recalled what Vance had said the night before about serious minds seeking recreation in children's games. There was something unutterably horrible in the juxtaposition of this juvenile card structure and violent death.

Vance stood looking down at the scene with sad, troubled eyes.

"*Hic jacet* John Pardee," he murmured, with a sort of reverence. "And this is the house that Jack built . . . a house of cards. . . ."

He stepped forward as if to inspect it more closely; but as his body struck the edge of the table there was a slight jar, and the flimsy edifice of cards toppled over.

Markham drew himself up and turned to Heath. "Have you notified the Medical Examiner?"

"Sure." The Sergeant seemed to find it difficult to take his eyes from the table. "And Burke's coming along, in case we need him." He went to the windows and threw up the shades, letting in the bright daylight. Then he returned to Pardee's body and stood regarding it appraisingly. Suddenly he knelt down and leaned over.

"That looks to me like the .38 that was in the tool-chest," he remarked.

"Undoubtedly," nodded Vance, taking out his cigarette-case.

Heath rose and, going to the chest, inspected the contents of its drawer. "I guess that's it, all right. We'll get Miss Dillard to identify it after the doc has been here."

At this moment Arnesson, clothed in a brilliant

red-and-yellow dressing-gown, burst excitedly into the room.

"By all the witches!" he exclaimed. "Pyne just told me the news." He came to the table and stared at Pardee's body. "Suicide, eh? . . . But why didn't he choose his own home for the performance? Damned inconsiderate of him to muss up some one else's house this way. Just like a chess player." He lifted his eyes to Markham. "Hope this won't involve us in more unpleasantness. We've had enough notoriety. Distracts the mind. When'll you be able to take the beggar's remains away? Don't want Belle to see him."

"The body will be removed as soon as the Medical Examiner has seen it," Markham told him in a tone of frosty rebuke. "And there will be no necessity to bring Miss Dillard here."

"Good." Arnesson still stood staring at the dead man. Slowly a look of cynical wistfulness came over his face. "Poor devil! Life was too much for him. Hypersensitive—no psychic stamina. Took things too seriously. Brooded over his fate ever since his gambit went up in smoke. Couldn't find any other diversion. The black bishop haunted him; probably tipped his mind from its axis. By Gad! Wouldn't be surprised if the idea drove him to self-destruction. Might have imagined he was a chess bishop—trying to get back at the world in the guise of his nemesis."

"Clever idea," returned Vance. "By the by, there was a house of cards on the table when we first saw the body."

"Ha! I wondered what the cards were doing there. Thought he might have sought solace in solitaire dur-

ing his last moments. . . . A card house, eh? Sounds foolish. Do you know the answer?"

"Not all of it. 'The house that Jack built' might explain something."

"I see." Arnesson looked owlish. "Playing children's games to the end—even on himself. Queer notion." He yawned cavernously. "Guess I'll get some clothes on." And he went up-stairs.

Professor Dillard had stood watching Arnesson with a look at once distressed and paternal. Now he turned to Markham with a gesture of annoyance.

"Sigurd's always protecting himself against his emotions. He's ashamed of his feelings. Don't take his careless attitude too seriously."

Before Markham could make a reply Pyne ushered Detective Burke into the room; and Vance took the opportunity of questioning the butler about his discovery of Pardee.

"How did it happen you entered the archery-room this morning?" he asked.

"It was a bit close in the pantry, sir," the man returned, "and I opened the door at the foot of the stairs to get a little more air. Then I noticed that the shades were down——"

"It's not custom'ry to draw the shades at night, then?"

"No, sir—not in this room."

"How about the windows?"

"I always leave them slightly open from the top at night."

"Were they left open last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very good.—And after you opened the door this morning?"

"I started to put out the lights, thinking Miss Dillard had forgotten to turn the switch last night; but just then I saw the poor gentleman there at the table, and went straight up and informed Professor Dillard."

"Does Beedle know about the tragedy?"

"I told her of it right after you gentlemen arrived."

"What time did you and Beedle retire last night?"

"At ten o'clock, sir."

When Pyne had left us Markham addressed Professor Dillard.

"It might be well for you to give us what details you can while we're waiting for Doctor Doremus.—Shall we go up-stairs?"

Burke remained in the archery-room, and the rest of us went to the library.

"I'm afraid there's little I can tell you," the professor began, settling himself and taking out his pipe. There was a noticeable reserve in his manner—a kind of detached reluctance. "Pardee came here last night after dinner, ostensibly to chat with Arnesson, but actually, I imagine, to see Belle. Belle, however, excused herself early and went to bed—the child had a bad headache—and Pardee remained until about half past eleven. Then he went out; and that was the last I saw of him until Pyne brought me the terrible news this morning. . . ."

"But if," put in Vance, "Mr. Pardee came to see your niece, how do you account for his staying so late after she had retired?"

"I don't account for it." The old man exhibited perplexity. "He gave the impression, though, that

there was something on his mind and that he desired a sense of human contact. The fact is, I had to hint rather broadly about being tired before he finally got up to go."

"Where was Mr. Arnesson during the evening?"

"Sigurd remained here talking with us for an hour or so after Belle had retired, and then went to bed. He'd been busy with Drukker's affairs all afternoon, and was played out."

"What time would that have been?"

"About half past ten."

"And you say," continued Vance, "that Mr. Pardee impressed you as being under a mental strain?"

"Not a strain exactly." The professor drew on his pipe, frowning. "He appeared depressed, almost melancholy."

"Did it strike you that he was in fear of something?"

"No; not in the least. He was more like a man who had suffered a great sorrow and couldn't shake the effects of it."

"When he went out did you go with him into the hall—that is, did you note which direction he took?"

"No. We always treated Pardee very informally here. He said good-night and left the room. I took it for granted he went to the front door and let himself out."

"Did you go to your own room at once?"

"In about ten minutes. I stayed up only long enough to arrange some papers I'd been working on."

Vance lapsed into silence—he was obviously puzzled over some phase of the episode; and Markham took up the interrogation.

"I suppose," he said, "that it is useless to ask if you heard any sound last night that might have been a shot."

"Everything in the house was quiet," Professor Dillard replied. "And anyway no sound of a shot would carry from the archery-room to this floor. There are two flights of stairs, the entire length of the lower hall and a passageway, and three heavy doors between. Moreover, the walls of this old house are very thick and solid."

"And no one," supplemented Vance, "could have heard the shot from the street, for the archery-room windows were carefully closed."

The professor nodded and gave him a searching look.

"That is true. I see you, too, noticed that peculiar circumstance. I don't quite understand why Pardee should have shut the windows."

"The idiosyncrasies of suicides have never been satisfactorily explained," returned Vance casually. Then, after a short pause, he asked: "What were you and Mr. Pardee talking about during the hour preceding his departure?"

"We talked very little. I was more or less engaged with a new paper of Millikan's in the *Physics Review* on alkali doublets, and I tried to interest him in it; but his mind, as I've said, was noticeably preoccupied, and he amused himself at the chess-board for the best part of the hour."

"Ah! Did he, now? That's most interestin'."

Vance glanced at the board. A number of pieces were still standing on the squares; and he rose quickly and crossed the room to the little table. After a moment he came back and reseated himself.

"Most curious," he murmured, and very deliberately lighted a cigarette. "He was evidently pondering over the end of his game with Rubinstein just before he went down-stairs last night. The pieces are set up exactly as they were at the time he resigned the contest—with the inevitable black-bishop-mate only five moves off."

Professor Dillard's gaze moved to the chess table wonderingly.

"The black bishop," he repeated in a low tone. "Could that have been what was preying on his mind last night? It seems unbelievable that so trivial a thing could affect him so disastrously."

"Don't forget, sir," Vance reminded him, "that the black bishop was the symbol of his failure. It represented the wreckage of his hopes. Less potent factors have driven men to take their own lives."

A few minutes later Burke informed us that the Medical Examiner had arrived. Taking leave of the professor we descended again to the archery-room, where Doctor Doremus was busy with his examination of Pardee's body.

He looked up as we entered and waved one hand perfunctorily. His usual jovial manner was gone.

"When's this business going to stop?" he grumbled. "I don't like the atmosphere round here. Murders—death from shock—suicides. Enough to give any one the creeps. I'm going to get a nice uneventful job in a slaughter house."

"We believe," said Markham, "that this is the end."

Doremus blinked. "So! That's it, is it?—the Bishop suicides after running the town ragged.

Sounds reasonable. Hope you're right." He again bent over the body, and, unflexing the fingers, tossed the revolver to the table.

"For your armory, Sergeant."

Heath dropped the weapon in his pocket.

"How long's he been dead, doc?"

"Oh, since midnight, or thereabouts. Maybe earlier, maybe later.—Any other fool questions?"

Heath grinned. "Is there any doubt about it being suicide?"

Doremus glared passionately at the Sergeant.

"What does it look like? A black-hand bombing?" Then he became professional. "The weapon was in his hand. Powder marks on the temple. Hole the right size for the gun, and in the right place. Position of the body natural. Can't see anything suspicious.—Why? Got any doubts?"

It was Markham who answered.

"To the contrary, doctor. Everything from our angle of the case points to suicide."

"It's suicide all right, then. I'll check up a little further, though.—Here, Sergeant, give me a hand."

When Heath had helped to lift Pardee's body to the divan for a more detailed examination, we went to the drawing-room where we were joined shortly by Arnesson.

"What's the verdict?" he asked, dropping into the nearest chair. "I suppose there's no question that the chap committed the act himself."

"Why should you raise the point, Mr. Arnesson?" Vance parried.

"No reason. An idle comment. Lots of queer things going on hereabouts."

"Oh, obviously." Vance blew a wreath of smoke upward. "No; the Medical Examiner seems to think there's no doubt in the matter. Did Pardee, by the by, impress you as bent on self-destruction last night?"

Arnesson considered. "Hard to say," he concluded. "He was never a gay soul. But suicide? . . . I don't know. However, you say there's no question about it; so there you are."

"Quite, quite. And how does this new situation fit into your formula?"

"Dissipates the whole equation, of course. No more need for speculation." Despite his words, he appeared uncertain. "What I can't understand," he added, "is why he should choose the archery-room. Lot of space in his own house for a *felo-de-se*."

"There was a convenient gun in the archery-room," suggested Vance. "And that reminds me: Sergeant Heath would like to have Miss Dillard identify the weapon, as a matter of form."

"That's easy. Where is it?"

Heath handed it to him, and he started from the room.

"Also"—Vance halted him—"you might ask Miss Dillard if she kept playing cards in the archery-room."

Arnesson returned in a few minutes and informed us that the gun was the one which had been in the tool-chest drawer, and that not only were playing cards kept in the table drawer of the archery-room but that Pardee knew of their presence there.

Doctor Doremus appeared soon afterwards and iterated his conclusion that Pardee had shot himself.

"That'll be my report," he said. "Can't see any way out of it. To be sure, lots of suicides are fakes —but that's *your* province. Nothing in the least suspicious here."

Markham nodded with undisguised satisfaction.

"We've no reason to question your findings, doctor. In fact, suicide fits perfectly with what we already know. It brings this whole Bishop orgy to a logical conclusion." He got up like a man from whose shoulders a great burden had been lifted. "Sergeant, I'll leave you to arrange for the removal of the body for the autopsy; but you'd better drop in at the Stuyvesant Club later. Thank Heaven today is Sunday! It gives us time to turn round."

That night at the club Vance and Markham and I sat alone in the lounge-room. Heath had come and gone, and a careful statement had been drawn up for the press announcing Pardee's suicide and intimating that the Bishop case was thereby closed. Vance had said little all day. He had refused to offer any suggestion as to the wording of the official statement, and had appeared reluctant even to discuss the new phase of the case. But now he gave voice to the doubts that had evidently been occupying his mind.

"It's too easy, Markham—much too easy. There's an aroma of speciousness about it. It's perfectly logical, d' ye see, but it's not satisfyin'. I can't exactly picture our Bishop terminating his debauch of humor in any such banal fashion. There's nothing witty in blowin' one's brain out—it's rather commonplace, don't y' know. Shows a woeful lack of originality. It's not worthy of the artificer of the Mother-Goose murders."

Markham was disgruntled.

"You yourself explained how the crimes accorded with the psychological possibilities of Pardee's mentality; and to me it appears highly reasonable that, having perpetrated his gruesome jokes and come to the end of his rope, he should have done away with himself."

"You're probably right," sighed Vance. "I haven't any coruscatin' arguments to combat you with. Only, I'm disappointed. I don't like anticlimaxes, especially when they don't jibe with my idea of the dramatist's talent. Pardee's death at this moment is too deuced neat—it clears things up too tidily. There's too much utility in it, and too little imagination."

Markham felt that he could afford to be tolerant.

"Perhaps his imagination was exhausted on the murders. His suicide might be regarded merely as a lowering of the curtain when the play was over. In any event, it was by no means an incredible act. Defeat and disappointment and discouragement—a thwarting of all one's ambitions—have constituted cause for suicide since time immemorial."

"Exactly. We have a reasonable motive, or explanation, for his suicide, but no motive for the murders."

"Pardee was in love with Belle Dillard," argued Markham; "and he probably knew that Robin was a suitor for her hand. Also, he was intensely jealous of Drukker."

"And Sprigg's murder?"

"We have no data on that point."

Vance shook his head.

"We can't separate the crimes as to motive. They

all sprang from one underlying impulse: they were actuated by a single urgent passion."

Markham sighed impatiently.

"Even if Pardee's suicide is unrelated to the murders, we're at a dead end, figuratively and literally."

"Yes, yes. A dead end. Very distressin'. Consolin' for the police, though. It lets them out—for a while, anyway. But don't misinterpret my vagaries. Pardee's death is unquestionably related to the murders. Rather intimate relationship, too, I'd say."

Markham took his cigar slowly from his mouth and scrutinized Vance for several moments.

"Is there any doubt in your mind," he asked, "that Pardee committed suicide?"

Vance hesitated before answering.

"I could bear to know," he drawled, "why that house of cards collapsed so readily when I deliberately leaned against the table——"

"Yes?"

"—and why it didn't topple over when Pardee's head and shoulders fell forward on the table after he'd shot himself."

"Nothing to that," said Markham. "The first jar may have loosened the cards——" Suddenly his eyes narrowed. "Are you implying that the card-house was built *after* Pardee was dead?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! I'm not indulgin' in implications. I'm merely givin' tongue to my youthful curiosity, don't y' know."

CHAPTER XXIII

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

(Monday, April 25; 8.30 p. m.)

Eight days went by. The Drukker funeral was held in the little house on 76th Street, attended only by the Dillards and Arnesson and a few men from the university who came to pay a last tribute of respect to a scientist for whose work they had a very genuine admiration.

Vance and I were at the house on the morning of the funeral when a little girl brought a small cluster of spring flowers she had picked herself, and asked Arnesson to give them to Drukker. I almost expected a cynical response from him, and was surprised when he took the flowers gravely and said in a tone almost tender:

"I'll give them to him at once, Madeleine. And Humpty Dumpty thanks you for remembering him." When the child had been led away by her governess, he turned to us. "She was Drukker's favorite. . . . Funny fellow. Never went to the theatre. Detested travel. His only recreation was entertaining youngsters."

I mention this episode because, in spite of its seeming unimportance, it was to prove one of the most vital links in the chain of evidence that eventually cleared up, beyond all question of doubt, the problem of the Bishop murders.

The death of Pardee had created a situation almost unique in the annals of modern crime. The statement given out by the District Attorney's office had only intimated that there was a possibility of Pardee's being guilty of the murders. Whatever Markham may have personally believed, he was far too honorable and just to cast any direct doubt on another's character without overwhelming proofs. But the wave of terror arising from these strange murders had reached such proportions that he could not, in view of the duty he owed to the community, refrain from saying that he believed the case to be closed. Thus, while no open accusation of guilt was made against Pardee, the Bishop murders were no longer regarded as a source of menace to the city, and a sigh of relief went up from all quarters.

In the Manhattan Chess Club there was probably less discussion of the case than anywhere else in New York. The members felt perhaps that the club's honor was in some way involved. Or there may have been a sense of loyalty toward a man who had done as much for chess as Pardee. But whatever the cause of the club's avoidance of the subject, the fact remained that its members attended, almost to a man, Pardee's funeral. I could not help admiring this tribute to a fellow chess player; for, whatever his personal acts, he had been one of the great sustaining patrons of the royal and ancient game to which they were devoted.*

Markham's first official act on the day after Par-

* Pardee left in his will a large sum for the furtherance of chess; and in the autumn of that same year, it will be remembered, the Pardee Memorial Tournament was held at Cambridge Springs.

dee's death was to secure Sperling's release. The same afternoon the Police Department moved all its records of the Bishop murders to the file marked "shelved cases," and withdrew the guards from the Dillard house. Vance protested mildly against this latter step; but, in view of the fact that the Medical Examiner's *post-mortem* report had substantiated in every particular the theory of suicide, there was little that Markham could do in the matter. Furthermore, he was thoroughly convinced that the death of Pardee had terminated the case; and he scoffed at Vance's wavering doubts.

During the week following the finding of Pardee's body Vance was restive and more distrait than usual. He attempted to interest himself in various matters, but without any marked success. He showed signs of irritability; and his almost miraculous equanimity seemed to have deserted him. I got the impression that he was waiting for something to happen. His manner was not exactly expectant, but there was a watchfulness in his attitude amounting at times almost to apprehension.

On the day following the Drukker funeral Vance called on Arnesson, and on Friday night accompanied him to a performance of Ibsen's "Ghosts"—a play which, I happened to know, he disliked. He learned that Belle Dillard had gone away for a month's visit to the home of a relative in Albany. As Arnesson explained, she had begun to show the effects of all she had been through, and needed a change of scene. The man was plainly unhappy over her absence, and confided to Vance that they had planned to be married in June. Vance also learned

from him that Mrs. Drukker's will had left everything to Belle Dillard and the professor in the event of her son's death—a fact which appeared to interest Vance unduly.

Had I known, or even suspected, what astounding and terrible things were hanging over us that week, I doubt if I could have stood the strain. For the Bishop murder case was not ended. The climactic horror was still to come; but even that horror, terrific and staggering as it proved, was only a shadow of what it might have been had not Vance reasoned the case out to two separate conclusions, only one of which had been disposed of by Pardee's death. It was this other possibility, as I learned later, that had kept him in New York, vigilant and mentally alert.

Monday, April 25, was the beginning of the end. We were to dine with Markham at the Bankers Club and go afterwards to a performance of "Die Meistersinger"*; but we did not witness the triumphs of *Walther* that night. I noticed that when we met Markham in the rotunda of the Equitable Building he seemed troubled; and we were no more than seated in the club grill when he told us of a phone call he had received from Professor Dillard that afternoon.

"He asked me particularly to come to see him tonight," Markham explained; "and when I tried to get out of it he became urgent. He made a point of the fact that Arnesson would be away the entire evening, and said that a similar opportunity might not

* Of the Wagnerian operas this was Vance's favorite. He always asserted that it was the only opera that had the structural form of a symphony; and more than once he expressed the regret that it had not been written as an orchestral piece instead of as a conveyance for an absurd drama.

present itself until it was too late. I asked him what he meant by that; but he refused to explain, and insisted that I come to his house after dinner. I told him I'd let him know if I could make it."

Vance had listened with the intensest interest.

"We must go there, Markham. I've been rather expecting a call of this kind. It's possible we may at last find the key to the truth."

"The truth about what?"

"Pardee's guilt."

Markham said no more, and we ate our dinner in silence.

At half past eight we rang the bell of the Dillard house, and were taken by Pyne direct to the library.

The old professor greeted us with nervous reserve.

"It's good of you to come, Markham," he said, without rising. "Take a chair and light a cigar. I want to talk to you—and I want to take my time about it. It's very difficult. . . ." His voice trailed off as he began filling his pipe.

We settled ourselves and waited. A sense of expectancy invaded me for no apparent reason, except perhaps that I caught some of the radiations of the professor's obviously distraught mood.

"I don't know just how to broach the subject," he began; "for it has to do, not with physical facts, but with the invisible human consciousness. I've struggled all week with certain vague ideas that have been forcing themselves upon me; and I see no way to rid myself of them but by talking with you. . . ."

He looked up hesitantly.

"I preferred to discuss these ideas with you when Sigurd was not present, and as he has gone to-night

to see Ibsen's 'Pretenders'—his favorite play, by the way—I took the opportunity to ask you here."

"What do these ideas concern?" asked Markham.

"Nothing specifically. As I have said, they're very vague; but they have nevertheless grown fairly insistent. . . . So insistent, in fact," he added, "that I thought it best to send Belle away for a while. It's true that she was in a tortured state of mind as a result of all these tragedies; but my real reason for shipping her north was that I was beset by intangible doubts."

"Doubts?" Markham leaned forward. "What sort of doubts?"

Professor Dillard did not reply at once.

"Let me answer that question by asking another," he countered presently. "Are you wholly satisfied in your mind that the situation in regard to Pardee is exactly as it appears?"

"You mean the authenticity of his suicide?"

"That and his presumptive culpability."

Markham settled back contemplatively.

"Are *you* not wholly satisfied?" he asked.

"I can't answer that question." Professor Dillard spoke almost curtly. "You have no right to ask me. I merely wanted to be sure that the authorities, having all the data in their hands, were convinced that this terrible affair was a closed book." A look of deep concern came over his face. "If I knew that to be a fact, it would help me to repulse the vague misgivings that have haunted me day and night for the past week."

"And if I were to say that I am not satisfied?"

The old professor's eyes took on a distant, dis-

tressed look. His head fell slightly forward, as if some burden of sorrow had suddenly weighed him down. After several moments he lifted his shoulders and drew a deep breath.

"The most difficult thing in this world," he said, "is to know where one's duty lies; for duty is a mechanism of the mind, and the heart is forever stepping in and playing havoc with one's resolutions. Perhaps I did wrong to ask you here; for, after all, I have only misty suspicions and nebulous ideas to go on. But there was the possibility that my mental uneasiness was based on some deep hidden foundation of whose existence I was unaware. . . . Do you see what I mean?" Evasive as were his words, there was no doubt as to the disturbing mien of the shadowy image that lurked at the back of his mind.

Markham nodded sympathetically.

"There is no reason whatever to question the findings of the Medical Examiner." He made the statement in a forced matter-of-fact voice. "I can understand how the proximity of these tragedies might have created an atmosphere conducive to doubts. But I think you need have no further misgivings."

"I sincerely hope you're right," the professor murmured; but it was clear he was not satisfied. "Suppose, Markham——" he began, and then stopped. "Yes, I hope you're right," he repeated.

Vance had sat through this unsatisfactory discussion smoking placidly; but he had been listening with unwonted concentration, and now he spoke.

"Tell me, Professor Dillard, if there has been anything—no matter how indefinite—that may have given birth to your uncertainty."

"No—nothing." The answer came quickly and with a show of spirit. "I have merely been wondering—testing every possibility. I dared not be too sanguine without some assurance. Pure logic is all very well for principles that do not touch us personally. But where one's own safety is concerned the imperfect human mind demands visual evidence."

"Ah, yes." Vance looked up, and I thought I detected a flash of understanding between these two disparate men.

Markham rose to make his adieu; but Professor Dillard urged him to remain a while.

"Sigurd will be here before long. He'd enjoy seeing you again. As I said, he's at 'The Pretenders,' but I'm sure he will come straight home. . . . By the way, Mr. Vance," he went on, turning from Markham; "Sigurd tells me you accompanied him to 'Ghosts' last week. Do you share his enthusiasm for Ibsen?"

A slight lift of Vance's eyebrows told me that he was somewhat puzzled by this question; but when he answered there was no hint of perplexity in his voice.

"I have read Ibsen a great deal; and there can be little doubt that he was a creative genius of a high order, although I've failed to find in him either the æsthetic form or the philosophic depth that characterizes Goethe's 'Faust,' for instance."

"I can see that you and Sigurd would have a permanent basis of disagreement."

Markham declined the invitation to stay longer, and a few minutes later we were walking down West End Avenue in the brisk April air.

"You will please take note, Markham old dear,"

observed Vance, with a touch of waggishness, as we turned into 72nd Street and headed for the park, "that there are others than your modest collaborator who are hag-ridden with doubts as to the volition of Pardee's taking-off. And I might add that the professor is not in the least satisfied with your assurances."

"His suspicious state of mind is quite understandable," submitted Markham. "These murders have touched his house pretty closely."

"That's not the explanation. The old gentleman has fears. And he knows something which he will not tell us."

"I can't say that I got that impression."

"Oh, Markham—my dear Markham! Weren't you listening closely to his halting, reluctant tale? It was as if he were trying to convey some suggestion to us without actually putting it into words. We were supposed to guess. Yes! That was why he insisted that you visit him when Arnesson was safely away at an Ibsen revival——"

Vance ceased speaking abruptly and stood stock-still. A startled look came in his eyes.

"Oh, my aunt! Oh, my precious aunt! So that was why he asked me about Ibsen! . . . My word! How unutterably dull I've been!" He stared at Markham, and the muscles of his jaw tightened. "The truth at last!" he said with impressive softness. "And it is neither you nor the police nor I who has solved this case: it is a Norwegian dramatist who has been dead for twenty years. In Ibsen is the key to the mystery."

Markham regarded him as though he had suddenly

gone out of his mind; but before he could speak Vance hailed a taxicab.

"I'll show you what I mean when we reach home," he said, as we rode east through Central Park. "It's unbelievable, but it's true. And I should have guessed it long ago; but the connotation of the signature on those notes was too clouded with other possible meanings. . . ."

"If it were midsummer instead of spring," commented Markham wrathfully, "I'd suggest that the heat had affected you."

"I knew from the first there were three possible guilty persons," continued Vance. "Each was psychologically capable of the murders, provided the impact of his emotions had upset his mental equilibrium. So there was nothing to do but to wait for some indication that would focus suspicion. Drukker was one of my three suspects, but he was murdered; and that left two. Then Pardee to all appearances committed suicide, and I'll admit that his death made reasonable the assumption that he had been the guilty one. But there was an eroding doubt in my mind. His death was not conclusive; and that house of cards troubled me. We were stalemated. So again I waited, and watched my third possibility. Now I know that Pardee was innocent, and that he did not shoot himself. He was murdered—just as were Robin and Sprigg and Drukker. His death was another grim joke—he was a victim thrown to the police in the spirit of diabolical jest. And the murderer has been chuckling at our gullibility ever since."

"By what reasoning do you arrive at so fantastic a conclusion?"

"It's no longer a question of reasoning. At last I have the explanation for the crimes; and I know the meaning of the 'Bishop' signature to the notes. I'll show you a piece of amazing and incontrovertible evidence very soon."

A few minutes later we reached his apartment, and he led us straight to the library.

"The evidence has been here within arm's reach all the time."

He went to the shelves where he kept his dramas, and took down Volume II of the collected works of Henrik Ibsen.* The book contained "The Vikings at Helgeland" and "The Pretenders"; but with the first of these plays Vance was not concerned. Turning to "The Pretenders" he found the page where the *dramatis personæ* were given, and laid the book on the table before Markham.

"Read the cast of characters of Arnesson's favorite play," he directed.

Markham, silent and puzzled, drew the volume toward him; and I looked over his shoulder. This is what we saw:

HÅKON HÅKONSSON, *the King elected by the Birchlegs.*
INGA OF VARTEIG, *his mother.*
EARL SKULE.
LADY RAGNHILD, *his wife.*
SIGRID, *his sister.*
MARGRETE, *his daughter.*
GUTHORM INGESSON.
SIGURD RIBBUNG.
NICHOLAS ARNESSON, *Bishop of Oslo.*
DAGFINN THE PEASANT, *Hakon's marshal.*

* Vance's set was the William Archer copyright edition, published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

Ivar Bodde, *his chaplain.*
Vegard Væradal, *one of his guard.*
Gregorius Jonsson, *a nobleman.*
Paul Flida, *a nobleman.*
Ingeborg, *Andres Skialdarband's wife.*
Peter, *her son, a young priest.*
Sira Viliam, *Bishop Nicholas's chaplain.*
Master Sigard of Brabant, *a physician.*
Jatgeir Skald, *an Icelander.*
Bård Bratte, *a chieftain from the Trondhiem district.*

But I doubt if either of us read beyond the line:

Nicholas Arnesson, *Bishop of Oslo.*

My eyes became riveted on that name with a set and horrified fascination. And then I remembered. . . . *Bishop Arnesson* was one of the most diabolical villains in all literature—a cynical, sneering monster who twisted all the sane values of life into hideous buffooneries.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST ACT

(Tuesday, April 26; 9 a. m.)

With this astounding revelation the Bishop murder case entered its final and most terrible phase. Heath had been informed of Vance's discovery; and it was arranged that we should meet in the District Attorney's office early the following day for a counsel of war.

Markham, when he took leave of us that night, was more troubled and despondent than I had ever seen him.

"I don't know what can be done," he said hopelessly. "There's no legal evidence against the man. But we may be able to devise some course of action that will give us the upper hand. . . . I never believed in torture, but I almost wish we had access today to the thumbscrew and the rack."

Vance and I arrived at his office a few minutes after nine the next morning. Swacker intercepted us and asked us to wait in the reception room for a little while. Markham, he explained, was engaged for the moment. We had no more than seated ourselves when Heath appeared, grim, pugnacious and sullen.

"I gotta hand it to you, Mr. Vance," he proclaimed. "You sure got a line on the situation. But what good it's going to do us I don't see. We can't arrest a guy because his name's in a book."

"We may be able to force the issue some way," Vance rejoined. "In any event, we now know where we stand."

Ten minutes later Swacker beckoned to us and indicated that Markham was free.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," Markham apologized. "I had an unexpected visitor." His voice had a despairing ring. "More trouble. And, curiously enough, it's connected with the very section of Riverside Park where Drukker was killed. However, there's nothing I can do about it. . . ." He drew some papers before him. "Now to business."

"What's the new trouble in Riverside Park?" asked Vance casually.

Markham frowned.

"Nothing that need bother us now. A kidnapping, in all likelihood. There's a brief account of it in the morning papers, in case you're interested. . . ."

"I detest reading the papers." Vance spoke blandly, but with an insistence that puzzled me. "What happened?"

Markham drew a deep breath of impatience.

"A child disappeared from the playground yesterday after talking with an unknown man. Her father came here to solicit my help. But it's a job for the Bureau of Missing Persons; and I told him so.—Now, if your curiosity is appeased——"

"Oh, but it isn't," persisted Vance. "I simply must hear the details. That section of the park fascinates me strangely."

Markham shot him a questioning glance through lowered lids.

"Very well," he asquiesced. "A five-year-old girl,

named Madeleine Moffat, was playing with a group of children at about half past five last evening. She crawled up on a high mound near the retaining wall, and a little later, when her governess went to get her, thinking she had descended the other side, the child was nowhere to be found. The only suggestive fact is that two of the other children say they saw a man talking to her shortly before she disappeared; but, of course, they can give no description of him. The police were notified, and are investigating. And that's all there is to the case so far."

" 'Madeleine.' " Vance repeated the name musingly. "I say, Markham; do you know if this child knew Drukker?"

"Yes!" Markham sat up a little straighter. "Her father mentioned that she often went to parties at his house. . . ."

"I've seen the child." Vance rose and stood, hands in pockets, gazing down at the floor. "An adorable little creature . . . golden curls. She brought a handful of flowers for Drukker the morning of his funeral. . . . And now she has disappeared after having been seen talking with a strange man. . . ."

"What's going on in your mind?" demanded Markham sharply.

Vance appeared not to have heard the question.

"Why should her father appeal to you?"

"I've known Moffat slightly for years—he was at one time connected with the city administration. He's frantic—grasping at every straw. The proximity of the affair to the Bishop murders has made him morbidly apprehensive. . . . But see here, Vance; we didn't come here to discuss the Moffat child's disappearance. . . ."

Vance lifted his head: there was a look of startled horror on his face.

"Don't speak—oh, don't speak. . . ." He began pacing up and down, while Markham and Heath watched him in mute amazement. "Yes—yes; that would be it," he murmured to himself. "The time is right . . . it all fits. . . ."

He swung about, and going to Markham seized his arm.

"Come—quickly! It's our only chance—we can't wait another minute." He fairly dragged Markham to his feet and led him toward the door. "I've been fearing something like this all week——"

Markham wrenched his arm free from the other's grip.

"I won't move from this office, Vance, until you explain."

"It's another act in the play—the last act! Oh, take my word for it." There was a look in Vance's eyes I had never seen before. "It's 'Little Miss Muffet' now. The name isn't identical, but that doesn't matter. It's near enough for the Bishop's jest; he'll explain it all to the press. He probably beckoned the child to the tuffet, and sat down beside her. And now she's gone—frightened away. . . ."

Markham moved forward in a sort of daze; and Heath, his eyes bulging, leapt to the door. I have often wondered what went on in their minds during those few seconds of Vance's importunate urgings. Did they believe in his interpretation of the episode? Or were they merely afraid not to investigate, in view of the remote possibility that another hideous joke had been perpetrated by the Bishop? Whatever

their convictions or doubts, they accepted the situation as Vance saw it; and a moment later we were in the hall, hastening toward the elevator. At Vance's suggestion we picked up Detective Tracy from the branch office of the Detective Bureau in the Criminal Courts Building.

"This affair is serious," he explained. "Anything may happen."

We emerged through the Franklin-Street entrance, and in a few minutes were on our way up-town in the District Attorney's car, breaking speed regulations and ignoring traffic signals. Scarcely a word was spoken on that momentous ride; but as we swung through the tortuous roads of Central Park Vance said:

"I may be wrong, but we will have to risk it. If we wait to see whether the papers get a note, it'll be too late. We're not supposed to know yet; and that's our one chance. . . ."

"What do you expect to find?" Markham's tone was husky and a little uncertain.

Vance shook his head despondently.

"Oh, I don't know. But it'll be something devilish."

When the car drew up with a lurch in front of the Dillard house Vance leapt out and ran up the steps ahead of us. Pyne answered his insistent ring.

"Where's Mr. Arnesson?" he demanded.

"At the university, sir," the old butler replied; and I imagined there was fright in his eyes. "But he'll be home for an early lunch."

"Then take us at once to Professor Dillard."

"I'm sorry, sir," Pyne told him; "but the professor is also out. He went to the Public Library——"

"Are you alone here?"

"Yes, sir. Beedle's gone to market."

"So much the better." Vance took hold of the butler and turned him toward the rear stairs. "We're going to search the house, Pyne. You lead the way."

Markham came forward.

"But, Vance, we can't do that!"

Vance wheeled round.

"I'm not interested in what you can do or can't do. I'm going to search this house. . . . Sergeant, are you with me?" There was a strange look on his face.

"You bet your sweet life!" (I never liked Heath as much as at that moment.)

The search was begun in the basement. Every hallway, every closet, every cupboard and waste space was inspected. Pyne, completely cowed by Heath's vindictiveness, acted as guide. He brought keys and opened doors for us, and even suggested places we might otherwise have overlooked. The Sergeant had thrown himself into the hunt with energy, though I am sure he had only a vague idea as to its object. Markham followed us disapprovingly; but he, too, had been caught in the sweep of Vance's dynamic purposefulness; and he must have realized that Vance had some tremendous justification for his rash conduct.

Gradually we worked our way upward through the house. The library and Arnesson's room were gone over carefully. Belle Dillard's apartment was scrutinized, and close attention was given to the unused rooms on the third floor. Even the servants' quarters on the fourth floor were overhauled. But noth-

ing suspicious was discovered. Though Vance suppressed his eagerness I could tell what a nervous strain he was under by the tireless haste with which he pushed the search.

Eventually we came to a locked door at the rear of the upper hall.

"Where does that lead?" Vance asked Pyne.

"To a little attic room, sir. But it's never used——"

"Unlock it."

The man fumbled for several moments with his bunch of keys.

"I don't seem to find the key, sir. It's supposed to be here. . . ."

"When did you have it last?"

"I couldn't say, sir. To my knowledge no one's been in the attic for years."

Vance stepped back and crouched.

"Stand aside, Pyne."

When the butler had moved out of the way Vance hurled himself against the door with terrific force. There was a creaking and straining of wood; but the lock held.

Markham rushed forward and caught him round the shoulders.

"Are you mad!" he exclaimed. "You're breaking the law."

"The law!" There was scathing irony in Vance's retort. "We're dealing with a monster who sneers at all law. You may coddle him if you care to, but I'm going to search that attic if it means spending the rest of my life in jail.—Sergeant, open that door!"

Again I experienced a thrill of liking for Heath. Without a moment's hesitation he poised himself on his toes and sent his shoulders crashing against the door's panel just above the knob. There was a splintering of wood as the lock's bolt tore through the moulding. The door swung inward.

Vance, freeing himself from Markham's hold, ran stumbling up the steps with the rest of us at his heels. There was no light in the attic, and we paused for a moment at the head of the stairs to accustom our eyes to the darkness. Then Vance struck a match and, groping forward, sent up the window shade with a clatter. The sunlight poured in, revealing a small room, scarcely ten feet square, cluttered with all manner of discarded odds and ends. The atmosphere was heavy and stifling, and a thick coating of dust lay over everything.

Vance looked quickly about him, and an expression of disappointment came over his face.

"This is the only place left," he remarked, with the calmness of desperation.

After a more careful scrutiny of the room, he stepped to the corner by the little window and peered down at a battered suit-case which lay on its side against the wall. I noticed that it was unlatched and that its straps hung free. Leaning over he threw the cover back.

"Ah! Here, at least, is something for you, Markham."

We crowded about him. In the suit-case was an old Corona typewriter. A sheet of paper was in the carriage; and on it had already been typed, in pale-blue élite characters, the two lines:

Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet

At this point the typist had evidently been interrupted, or for some other reason had not completed the Mother-Goose rhyme.

"The new Bishop note for the press," observed Vance. Then reaching into the suit-case he lifted out a pile of blank paper and envelopes. At the bottom, beside the machine, lay a red-leather note-book with thin yellow leaves. He handed it to Markham with the terse announcement:

"Drukker's calculations on the quantum theory."

But there was still a look of defeat in his eyes; and again he began inspecting the room. Presently he went to an old dressing-table which stood against the wall opposite to the window. As he bent over to peer behind it he suddenly drew back and, lifting his head, sniffed several times. At the same moment he caught sight of something on the floor at his feet, and kicked it toward the centre of the room. We looked down at it with astonishment. It was a gas-mask of the kind used by chemists.

"Stand back, you chaps!" he ordered; and holding one hand to his nose and mouth he swung the dressing-table away from the wall. Directly behind it was a small cupboard door about three feet high, set into the wall. He wrenched it open and looked inside, then slammed it shut immediately.

Brief as was my view of the interior of the cupboard, I was able to glimpse its contents clearly. It was fitted with two shelves. On the lower one were several books lying open. On the upper shelf stood

an Erlenmeyer flask clamped to an iron support, a spirit-lamp, a condenser tube, a glass beaker, and two small bottles.

Vance turned and gave us a despairing look.

"We may as well go: there's nothing more here."

We returned to the drawing-room, leaving Tracy to guard the door to the attic.

"Perhaps, after all, you were justified in your search," acknowledged Markham, studying Vance gravely. "I don't like such methods, however. If we hadn't found the typewriter——"

"Oh, that!" Vance, preoccupied and restless, went to the window overlooking the archery range. "I wasn't hunting for the typewriter—or the note-book, either. What do they matter?" His chin fell forward on his breast, and his eyes closed in a kind of lethargy of defeat. "Everything's gone wrong—my logic has failed. We're too late."

"I don't pretend to know what you're grumbling about," said Markham. "But at least you've supplied me evidence of a sort. I'll now be able to arrest Arnesson when he returns from the university."

"Yes, yes; of course. But I wasn't thinking of Arnesson, or the arrest of the culprit, or the triumph of the District Attorney's office. I was hoping——"

He broke off and stiffened.

"We're *not* too late! I didn't think far enough. . . ." He went swiftly to the archway. "It's the Drukker house we must search. . . . Hurry!" He was already half-running down the hall, Heath behind him, and Markham and I bringing up the rear.

We followed him down the rear stairs, across the archery-room, and out on the range. We did not

know, and I doubt if any of us even guessed, what was in his mind; but some of his inner excitation had been communicated to us, and we realized that only a vital urgency could have shaken him so completely out of his usual attitude of disinterest and calm.

When we came to the screen-porch of the Drukker house he reached through the broken wire-netting and released the catch. The kitchen door, to my astonishment, was unlocked; but Vance seemed to expect this, for he unhesitatingly turned the knob and threw it open.

"Wait!" he directed, pausing in the little rear hallway. "There's no need to search the entire house. The most likely place. . . . Yes! Come along . . . up-stairs . . . somewhere in the centre of the house . . . a closet most likely . . . where no one could hear. . . ." As he spoke he led the way up the rear stairs, past Mrs. Drukker's room and the study, and thence to the third floor. There were but two doors on this upper hall—one at the extreme end, and a smaller door set midway in the right wall.

Vance went straight to the latter. There was a key protruding from the lock, and, turning it, he drew open the door. Only a shadowy blackness met our eyes. Vance was on his knees in a second, groping inside.

"Quick, Sergeant. Your flash-light."

Almost before he had uttered the words a luminous circle fell on the floor of the closet. What I saw sent a chill of horror over me. A choked exclamation burst from Markham; and a soft whistle told me that Heath too was appalled by the sight. Before us on the floor, in a limp, silent heap, lay the little girl

who had brought flowers to her broken Humpty Dumpty on the morning of his funeral. Her golden hair was dishevelled; her face was deathly pale, and there were streaks down her cheeks where the futile tears had welled forth and dried.

Vance bent over and put his ear to her heart. Then he gathered her tenderly in his arms.

"Poor little Miss Muffet," he whispered, and rising went toward the front stairs. Heath preceded him, flashing his light all the way so there would be no chance of his stumbling. In the main lower hall he paused.

"Unbolt the door, Sergeant."

Heath obeyed with alacrity, and Vance stepped out on the sidewalk.

"Go to the Dillards' and wait for me there," he flung back over his shoulder. And with the child clasped closely to his breast he started diagonally across 76th Street to a house on which I could make out a doctor's brass name-plate.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CURTAIN FALLS

(Tuesday, April 26; 11 a. m.)

Twenty minutes later Vance rejoined us in the Dillard drawing-room.

"She's going to be all right," he announced, sinking into a chair and lighting a cigarette. "She was only unconscious, had fainted from shock and fright; and she was half-suffocated." His face darkened. "There were bruises on her little wrist. She probably struggled in that empty house when she failed to find Humpty Dumpty; and then the beast forced her into the closet and locked the door. No time to kill her, d' ye see. Furthermore, killing wasn't in the book. 'Little Miss Muffet' wasn't killed—merely frightened away. She'd have died, though, from lack of air. And *he* was safe: no one could hear her crying. . . ."

Markham's eyes rested on Vance affectionately.

"I'm sorry I tried to hold you back," he said simply. (For all his conventionally legal instincts, there was a fundamental bigness to his nature.) "You were right in forcing the issue, Vance. . . . And you, too, Sergeant. We owe a great deal to your determination and faith."

Heath was embarrassed.

"Oh, that's all right, sir. You see, Mr. Vance had me all worked up about the kid. And I like kids, sir."

Markham turned an inquisitive look on Vance.

"You expected to find the child alive?"

"Yes; but drugged or stunned perhaps. I didn't think of her as dead, for that would have contravened the Bishop's joke."

Heath had been pondering some troublous point.

"What I can't get through my head," he said, "is why this Bishop, who's been so damn careful about everything else, should leave the door of the Drukker house unlocked."

"We were expected to find the child," Vance told him. "Everything was made easy for us. Very considerate of the Bishop, what? But we weren't supposed to find her till to-morrow—after the papers had received the Little-Miss-Muffet notes. They were to have been our clew. But we anticipated the gentleman."

"But why weren't the notes sent yesterday?"

"It was no doubt the Bishop's original intention to post his poetry last night; but I imagine he decided it was best for his purpose to let the child's disappearance attract public attention first. Otherwise the relationship between Madeleine Moffat and little Miss Muffet might have been obscured."

"Yeh!" snarled Heath through his teeth. "And by to-morrow the kid woulda been dead. No chance then of her identifying him."

Markham looked at his watch and rose with determination.

"There's no point in waiting for Arnesson's return. The sooner we arrest him the better." He was about to give Heath an order when Vance intervened.

"Don't force the issue, Markham. You haven't any real evidence against the man. It's too delicate

a situation for aggression. We must go carefully or we'll fail."

"I realize that the finding of the typewriter and the note-book is not conclusive," concurred Markham. "But the identification by the child——"

"Oh, my dear fellow! What weight would a jury attach to a frightened five-year-old girl's identification without powerful contribut'ry evidence? A clever lawyer could nullify it in five minutes. And even assuming you could make the identification hold, what would it boot you? It wouldn't connect Arnesson in any way with the Bishop murders. You could only prosecute him for attempted kidnapping,—the child's unharmed, remember. And if you should, through a legal miracle, get a doubtful conviction, Arnesson would receive at most a few years in the bastille. That wouldn't end this horror. . . . No, no. You mustn't be precipitate."

Reluctantly Markham resumed his seat. He saw the force of Vance's argument.

"But we can't let this thing go on," he declared ferociously. "We must stop this maniac some way."

"Some way—yes." Vance began pacing the room restlessly. "We may be able to wangle the truth out of him by subterfuge: he doesn't know yet that we've found the child. . . . It's possible Professor Dillard could assist us——" He halted and stood looking down at the floor. "Yes! That's our one chance. We must confront Arnesson with what we know when the professor is present. The situation is sure to force an issue of some kind. The professor now will do all in his power to help convict Arnesson."

"You believe he knows more than he had told us?"

"Undoubtedly. I've told you so from the first. And when he hears of the Little-Miss-Muffet episode, it's not unlikely he'll supply us with the evidence we need."

"It's a long chance." Markham was pessimistic. "But it can do no harm to try. In any event, I shall arrest Arnesson before I leave here, and hope for the best."

A few moments later the front door opened and Professor Dillard appeared in the hall opposite the archway. He scarcely acknowledged Markham's greeting—he was scanning our faces as if trying to read the meaning of our unexpected visit. Finally he put a question.

"You have, perhaps, thought over what I said last night?"

"Not only have we thought it over," said Markham, "but Mr. Vance has found the thing that was disturbing you. After we left here he showed me a copy of 'The Pretenders.' "

"Ah!" The exclamation was like a sigh of relief. "For days that play has been in my mind, poisoning every thought. . . ." He looked up fearfully. "What does it mean?"

Vance answered the question.

"It means, sir, that you've led us to the truth. We're waiting now for Mr. Arnesson.—And I think it would be well if we had a talk with you in the meantime. You may be able to help us."

The old man hesitated.

"I had hoped not to be made an instrument in the boy's conviction." His voice held a tragic paternal note. But presently his features hardened; a vin-

dictive light shone in his eyes; and his hand tightened over the knob of his stick. "However, I can't consider my own feelings now. Come; I will do what I can."

On reaching the library he paused by the sideboard and poured himself a glass of port. When he had drunk it he turned to Markham with a look of apology.

"Forgive me. I'm not quite myself." He drew forward the little chess table and placed glasses on it for all of us. "Please overlook my discourtesy." He filled the glasses and sat down.

We drew up chairs. There was none of us, I think, who did not feel the need of a glass of wine after the harrowing events we had just passed through.

When we had settled ourselves the professor lifted heavy eyes to Vance, who had taken a seat opposite to him.

"Tell me everything," he said. "Don't try to spare me."

Vance drew out his cigarette-case.

"First, let me ask you a question. Where was Mr. Arnesson between five and six yesterday afternoon?"

"I—don't know." There was a reluctance in the words. "He had tea here in the library; but he went out about half past four, and I didn't see him again until dinner time."

Vance regarded the other sympathetically for a moment, then he said:

"We've found the typewriter on which the Bishop notes were printed. It was in an old suit-case hidden in the attic of this house."

The professor showed no sign of being startled.

"You were able to identify it?"

"Beyond any doubt. Yesterday a little girl named Madeleine Moffat disappeared from the playground in the park. There was a sheet of paper in the machine, and on it had already been typed: 'Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet.' "

Professor Dillard's head sank forward.

"Another insane atrocity! If only I hadn't waited till last night to warn you——!"

"No great harm has been done," Vance hastened to inform him. "We found the child in time: she's out of danger now."

"Ah!"

"She had been locked in the hall-closet on the top floor of the Drukker house. We had thought she was here somewhere—which is how we came to search your attic."

There was a silence; then the professor asked:

"What more have you to tell me?"

"Drukker's note-book containing his recent quantum researches was stolen from his room the night of his death. We found this note-book in the attic with the typewriter."

"He stooped even to that?" It was not a question, but an exclamation of incredulity. "Are you sure of your conclusions? Perhaps if I had made no suggestion last night—had not sowed the seed of suspicion. . . ."

"There can be no doubt," declared Vance softly. "Mr. Markham intends to arrest Mr. Arnesson when he returns from the university. But to be frank with you, sir: we have practically no legal evidence, and

it is a question in Mr. Markham's mind whether or not the law can even hold him. The most we can hope for is a conviction for attempted kidnapping through the child's identification."

"Ah, yes . . . the child would know." A bitterness crept into the old man's eyes. "Still, there should be some means of obtaining justice for the other crimes."

Vance sat smoking pensively, his eyes on the wall beyond. At last he spoke with quiet gravity.

"If Mr. Arnesson were convinced that our case against him was a strong one, he might choose suicide as a way out. That perhaps would be the most humane solution for every one."

Markham was about to make an indignant protest, but Vance anticipated him.

"Suicide is not an indefensible act *per se*. The Bible, for instance, contains many accounts of heroic suicide. What finer example of courage than Rhazis', when he threw himself from the tower to escape the yoke of Demetrius?* There was gallantry, too, in the death of Saul's sword-bearer, and in the self-hanging of Ahithophel. And surely the suicides of Samson and Judas Iscariot had virtue. History is filled with notable suicides—Brutus and Cato of Utica, Hannibal, Lucretia, Cleopatra, Seneca. . . . Nero killed himself lest he fall into the hands of Otho and the Pretorian guards. In Greece we have the famous self-destruction of Demosthenes; and Empedocles threw himself in the crater of Etna.

* I admit that the name of Rhazis was unfamiliar to me; and when I looked it up later I found that the episode to which Vance referred does not appear in the Anglican Bible, but in the second book of Maccabees in the Apocrypha.

Aristotle was the first great thinker to advance the dictum that suicide is an anti-social act, but, according to tradition, he himself took poison after the death of Alexander. And in modern times let us not forget the sublime gesture of Baron Nogi. . . ."

"All that is no justification of the act," Markham retorted. "The law——"

"Ah, yes—the law. In Chinese law every criminal condemned to death has the option of suicide. The Codex adopted by the French National Assembly at the end of the eighteenth century abolished all punishments for suicide; and in the *Sachsenspiegel*—the principal foundation of Teuton law—it is plainly stated that suicide is not a punishable act. Moreover, among the Donatists, Circumcellions and Patricians suicide was considered pleasing to the gods. And even in More's Utopia there was a synod to pass on the right of the individual to take his own life. . . . Law, Markham, is for the protection of society. What of a suicide that makes possible that protection? Are we to invoke a legal technicality, when, by so doing, we actually lay society open to continued danger? Is there no law higher than those on the statute books?"

Markham was sorely troubled. He rose and walked the length of the room and back, his face dark with anxiety. When he sat down again he looked at Vance a long while, his fingers drumming with nervous indecision on the table.

"The innocent of course must be considered," he said in a voice of discouragement. "As morally wrong as suicide is, I can see your point that at times it may be theoretically justified." (Knowing Mark-

ham as I did, I realized what this concession had cost him; and I realized, too, for the first time, how utterly hopeless he felt in the face of the scourge of horror which it was his duty to wipe out.)

The old professor nodded understandingly.

"Yes, there are some secrets so hideous that it is well for the world not to know them. A higher justice may often be achieved without the law taking its toll."

As he spoke the door opened, and Arnesson stepped into the room.

"Well, well. Another conference, eh?" He gave us a quizzical leer, and threw himself into a chair beside the professor. "I thought the case had been adjudicated, so to speak. Didn't Pardee's suicide put *finis* to the affair?"

Vance looked straight into the man's eyes.

"We've found little Miss Muffet, Mr. Arnesson."

The other's eyebrows went up with sardonic amusement.

"Sounds like a charade. What am I supposed to answer: 'How's little Jack Horner's thumb?' Or, should I inquire into the health of Jack Sprat?"

Vance did not relax his steady gaze.

"We found her in the Drukker house, locked in a closet," he amplified, in a low, even tone.

Arnesson became serious, and an involuntary frown gathered on his forehead. But this slackening of pose was only transient. Slowly his mouth twisted into a smirk.

"You policemen are so efficient. Fancy finding little Miss Muffet so soon. Remarkable." He wagged his head in mock admiration. "However,

sooner or later it was to be expected.—And what, may I ask, is to be the next move?"

"We also found the typewriter," pursued Vance, ignoring the question. "And Drukker's stolen note-book."

Arnesson was at once on his guard.

"Did you really?" He gave Vance a canny look. "Where were these tell-tale objects?"

"Up-stairs—in the attic."

"Aha! Housebreaking?"

"Something like that."

"Withal," Arnesson scoffed, "I can't see that you have a cast-iron case against any one. A typewriter is not like a suit of clothes that fits only one person. And who can say how Drukker's note-book found its way into our attic?—You must do better than that, Mr. Vance."

"There is, of course, the factor of opportunity. The Bishop is a person who could have been on hand at the time of each murder."

"That is the flimsiest of contributory evidence," the man countered. "It would not help much toward a conviction."

"We might be able to show why the murderer chose the sobriquet of Bishop."

"Ah! That unquestionably would help." A cloud settled on Arnesson's face, and his eyes became reminiscent. "I'd thought of that, too."

"Oh, had you, now?" Vance watched him closely. "And there's another piece of evidence I haven't mentioned. Little Miss Muffet will be able to identify the man who led her to the Drukker house and forced her into the closet."

"So! The patient has recovered?"

"Oh, quite. Doing nicely, in fact. We found her, d' ye see, twenty-four hours before the Bishop intended us to."

Arnesson was silent. He was staring down at his hands which, though folded, were working nervously. Finally he spoke.

"And if, in spite of everything, you were wrong. . . ."

"I assure you, Mr. Arnesson," said Vance quietly, "that I *know* who is guilty."

"You positively frighten me!" The man had got a grip on himself, and he retorted with biting irony. "If, by any chance, I myself were the Bishop, I'd be inclined to admit defeat. . . . Still, it's quite obvious that it was the Bishop who took the chessman to Mrs. Drukker at midnight; and I didn't return home with Belle until half past twelve that night."

"So you informed her. As I recall, you looked at your watch and told her what time it was.—Come, now: what time was it?"

"That's correct—half past twelve."

Vance sighed and tapped the ash from his cigarette.

"I say, Mr. Arnesson; how good a chemist are you?"

"One of the best," the man grinned. "Majored in it.—What then?"

"When I was searching the attic this morning I discovered a little wall-closet in which some one had been distilling hydrocyanic acid from potassium ferrocyanide. There was a chemist's gas-mask on hand, and all the paraphernalia. Bitter-almond odor still lurking in the vicinity."

"Quite a treasure-trove, our attic. A sort of haunt of Loki, it would seem."

"It was just that," returned Vance gravely, "—the den of an evil spirit."

"Or else the laboratory of a modern Doctor Faustus. . . . But why the cyanide, do you think?"

"Precaution, I'd say. In case of trouble the Bishop could step out of the picture painlessly. Everything in readiness, don't y' know."

Arnesson nodded.

"Quite a correct attitude on his part. Really decent of him, in fact. No use putting people to unnecessary bother if you're cornered. Yes, very correct."

Professor Dillard had sat during this sinister dialogue with one hand pressed to his eyes, as though in pain. Now he turned sorrowfully to the man he had fathered for so many years.

"Many great men, Sigurd, have justified suicide——" he began; but Arnesson cut him short with a cynical laugh.

"Faugh! Suicide needs no justification. Nietzsche laid the bugaboo of voluntary death. '*Auf eine stolze Art sterben, wenn es nicht mehr möglich ist, auf eine stolze Art zu leben. Der Tod unter den verächtlichsten Bedingungen, ein unfreier Tod, ein Tod zur unrechten Zeit ist ein Feiglings-Tod. Wir haben es nicht in der Hand, zu verhindern, geboren zu werden: aber wir können diesen Fehler—denn bisweilen ist es ein Fehler—wieder gut machen. Wenn man sich abschafft, tut man die achtungswürdigste Sache, die es giebt: man verdient beinahe damit, zu leben.*'*

* "One should die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. The death which takes place in the most contemptible

—Memorized that passage from 'Götzen-Dämmerung' in my youth. Never forgot it. A sound doctrine."

"Nietzsche had many famous predecessors who also upheld suicide," supplemented Vance. "Zeno the Stoic left us a passionate dithyramb defending voluntary death. And Tacitus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Cato, Kant, Fichte, Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, all wrote apologias for suicide. Schopenhauer protested bitterly against the fact that suicide was regarded as a crime in England. . . . And yet, I wonder if the subject can be formulated. Somehow I feel that it's too personal a matter for academic discussion."

The professor agreed sadly.

"No one can know what goes on in the human heart in that last dark hour."

During this discussion Markham had been growing impatient and uneasy; and Heath, though at first rigid and watchful, had begun to unbend. I could not see that Vance had made the slightest progress; and I was driven to the conclusion that he had failed signally in accomplishing his purpose of ensnaring Arnesson. However, he did not appear in the least perturbed. I even got the impression that he was satisfied with the way things were going. But I did notice that, despite his outer calm, he was intently alert. His feet were drawn back and poised; and

circumstances, the death that is not free, the death which occurs at the wrong time, is the death of a coward. We have not the power to prevent ourselves from being born; but this error—for sometimes it is an error—can be rectified if we choose. The man who does away with himself, performs the most estimable of deeds; he almost deserves to live for having done so."

every muscle in his body was taut. I began to wonder what the outcome of this terrible conference would be.

The end came swiftly. A short silence followed the professor's remark. Then Arnesson spoke.

"You say you know who the Bishop is, Mr. Vance. That being the case, why all this palaver?"

"There was no great haste." Vance was almost casual. "And there was the hope of tying up a few loose ends,—hung juries are so unsatisfact'ry, don't y' know. . . . Then again, this port is excellent."

"The port? . . . Ah yes." Arnesson glanced at our glasses, and turned an injured look on the professor. "Since when have I been a teetotaler, sir?"

The other gave a start, hesitated, and rose.

"I'm sorry, Sigurd. It didn't occur to me . . . you never drink in the forenoon." He went to the sideboard and, filling another glass, placed it, with an unsteady hand, before Arnesson. Then he refilled the other glasses.

No sooner had he resumed his seat than Vance uttered an exclamation of surprise. He had half risen and was leaning forward, his hands resting on the edge of the table, his eyes fixed with astonishment on the mantel at the end of the room.

"My word! I never noticed that before. . . . Extr'ordin'ry!"

So unexpected and startling had been his action, and so tense was the atmosphere, that involuntarily we swung about and looked in the direction of his fascinated gaze.

"A Cellini plaque!" he exclaimed. "The Nymph of Fontainebleau! Berenson told me it was de-

stroyed in the seventeenth century. I've seen its companion piece in the Louvre. . . ."

A red flush of angry indignation mounted to Markham's cheeks; and for myself I must say that, familiar as I was with Vance's idiosyncrasies and intellectual passion for rare antiques, I had never before known him to exhibit such indefensible bad taste. It seemed unbelievable that he would have let himself be distracted by an *objet-d'art* in such a tragic hour.

Professor Dillard frowned at him with consternation.

"You've chosen a strange time, sir, to indulge your enthusiasm for art," was his scathing comment.

Vance appeared abashed and chagrined. He sank back in his seat, avoiding our eyes, and began turning the stem of his glass between his fingers.

"You are quite right, sir," he murmured. "I owe you an apology."

"The plaque, incidentally," the professor added, by way of mitigating the severity of his rebuke, "is merely a copy of the Louvre piece."

Vance, as if to hide his confusion, raised his wine to his lips. It was a highly unpleasant moment: every one's nerves were on edge; and, in automatic imitation of his action, we lifted our glasses too.

Vance gave a swift glance across the table and, rising, went to the front window, where he stood, his back to the room. So unaccountable was his hasty departure that I turned and watched him wonderingly. Almost at the same moment the edge of the table was thrust violently against my side, and simultaneously there came a crash of glassware.

I leapt to my feet and gazed down with horror at

the inert body sprawled forward in the chair opposite, one arm and shoulder flung across the table. A short silence of dismay and bewilderment followed. Each of us seemed momentarily paralyzed. Markham stood like a graven image, his eyes fastened on the table; and Heath, staring and speechless, clung rigidly to the back of his chair.

"*Good Gad!*"

It was Arnesson's astonished ejaculation that snapped the tension.

Markham went quickly round the table and bent over Professor Dillard's body.

"Call a doctor, Arnesson," he ordered.

Vance turned wearily from the window and sank into a chair.

"Nothing can be done for him," he said, with a deep sigh of fatigue. "He prepared for a swift and painless death when he distilled his cyanide.—The Bishop case is over."

Markham was glaring at him with dazed incomprehension.

"Oh, I've half-suspected the truth ever since Pardee's death," Vance went on, in answer to the other's unspoken question. "But I wasn't sure of it until last night when he went out of his way to hang the guilt on Mr. Arnesson."

"Eh? What's that?" Arnesson turned from the telephone.

"Oh, yes," nodded Vance. "You were to pay the penalty. You'd been chosen from the first as the victim. He even suggested the possibility of your guilt to us."

Arnesson did not seem as surprised as one would have expected.

"I knew the professor hated me," he said. "He was intensely jealous of my interest in Belle. And he was losing his intellectual grip—I've seen that for months. I've done all the work on his new book, and he's resented every academic honor paid me. I've had an idea he was back of all this deviltry; but I wasn't sure. I didn't think, though, he'd try to send me to the electric-chair."

Vance got up and, going to Arnesson, held out his hand.

"There was no danger of that.—And I want to apologize for the way I've treated you this past half hour. Merely a matter of tactics. Y' see, we hadn't any real evidence, and I was hopin' to force his hand."

Arnesson grinned sombrely.

"No apology necessary, old son. I knew you didn't have your eye on me. When you began riding me I saw it was only technique. Didn't know what you were after, but I followed your cues the best I could. Hope I didn't bungle the job."

"No, no. You turned the trick."

"Did I?" Arnesson frowned with deep perplexity. "But what I don't understand is why he should have taken the cyanide when he thought it was I you suspected."

"That particular point we'll never know," said Vance. "Maybe he feared the girl's identification. Or he may have seen through my deception. Perhaps he suddenly revolted at the idea of shouldering you with the onus. . . . As he himself said, no one knows what goes on in the human heart during the last dark hour."

Arnesson did not move. He was looking straight into Vance's eyes with penetrating shrewdness.

"Oh, well," he said at length; "we'll let it go at that. . . . Anyway, thanks!"

CHAPTER XXVI

HEATH ASKS A QUESTION

(Tuesday, April 26; 4 p. m.)

When Markham and Vance and I departed from the Dillard house an hour later, I thought the Bishop affair was over. And it was over as far as the public was concerned. But there was another revelation to come; and it was, in a way, the most astounding of all the facts that had been brought to light that day.

Heath joined us at the District Attorney's office after lunch, for there were several delicate official matters to be discussed; and later that afternoon Vance reviewed the entire case, explaining many of its obscure points.

"Arnesson has already suggested the motive for these insane crimes," he began. "The professor knew that his position in the world of science was being usurped by the younger man. His mind had begun to lose its force and penetration; and he realized that his new book on atomic structure was being made possible only through Arnesson's help. A colossal hate grew up in him for his foster son; Arnesson became in his eyes a kind of monster whom he himself, like Frankenstein, had created, and who was now rising to destroy him. And this intellectual enmity was augmented by a primitive emotional jealousy. For ten years he had centred in Belle Dillard the accumulated affection of a life of solit'ry bachelorhood—she

represented his one hold on every-day existence—and when he saw that Arnesson was likely to take her from him, his hatred and resentment were doubled in intensity."

"The motive is understandable," said Markham. "But it does not explain the crimes."

"The motive acted as a spark to the dry powder of his pent-up emotions. In looking about for a means to destroy Arnesson, he hit upon the diabolical jest of the Bishop murders. These murders gave relief to his repressions; they met his psychic need for violent expression; and at the same time they answered the dark question in his mind how he could dispose of Arnesson and keep Belle Dillard for himself."

"But why," Markham asked, "didn't he merely murder Arnesson and have done with it?"

"You overlook the psychological aspects of the situation. The professor's mind had disintegrated through long intense repression. Nature was demanding an outlet. And it was his passionate hatred of Arnesson that brought the pressure to an explosion point. The two impulses were thus combined. In committing the murders he was not only relieving his inhibitions, but he was also venting his wrath against Arnesson, for Arnesson, d' ye see, was to pay the penalty. Such a revenge was more potent, and hence more satisfying, than the mere killing of the man would have been,—it was the great grim joke behind the lesser jokes of the murders themselves. . . .

"However, this fiendish scheme had one great disadvantage, though the professor did not see it. It laid the affair open to psychological analysis; and

at the outset I was able to postulate a mathematician as the criminal agent. The difficulty of naming the murderer lay in the fact that nearly every possible suspect was a mathematician. The only one I knew to be innocent was Arnesson, for he was the only one who consistently maintained a psychic balance—that is, who constantly discharged the emotions arising from his protracted abstruse speculations. A general sadistic and cynical attitude that is volubly expressed, and a violent homicidal outburst, are psychologically equivalent. Giving full rein to one's cynicism as one goes along produces a normal outlet and maintains an emotional equilibrium. Cynical, scoffing men are always safe, for they are farthest removed from sporadic physical outbreaks; whereas the man who represses his sadism and accumulates his cynicism beneath a grave and stoical exterior is always liable to dangerous fulminations. This is why I knew Arnesson was incapable of the Bishop murders and why I suggested your letting him help us with the investigation. As he admitted, he suspected the professor; and his request to assist us was, I believe, actuated by a desire to keep posted so that he could better protect Belle Dillard and himself in case his suspicions should prove correct."

"That sounds reasonable," acceded Markham. "But where did Dillard get his fantastic ideas for the murders?"

"The Mother-Goose motif was probably suggested to him when he heard Arnesson jestingly tell Robin to beware of an arrow from Sperling's bow. He saw in that remark a means of venting his hatred against the man who had made it; and he bided his time.

The opportunity to stage the crime came shortly after. When he saw Sperling pass up the street that morning, he knew that Robin was alone in the archery-room. So he went below, engaged Robin in conversation, struck him over the head, drove a shaft into his heart, and shoved him out on the range. He then wiped up the blood, destroyed the cloth, posted his notes at the corner, put one in the house letter-box, returned to the library, and called up this office. One unforeseen factor cropped up, however:—Pyne was in Arnesson's room when the professor said he went out on the balcony. But no harm came of it, for though Pyne knew something was amiss when he caught the professor lying, he certainly didn't suspect the old gentleman of being a murderer. The crime was a decided success."

"Still and all," put in Heath, "you guessed that Robin hadn't been shot with a bow and arrow."

"Yes. I saw from the battered condition of the nock of the arrow that it had been hammered into Robin's body; and I concluded therefore that the chap had been killed indoors, after having first been stunned with a blow on the head. That was why I assumed that the bow had been thrown to the range from the window,—I didn't know then that the professor was guilty. The bow of course was never on the range.—But the evidence on which I based my deductions cannot be held as an error or oversight on the professor's part. As long as his Mother-Goose joke was accomplished, the rest didn't matter to him."

"What instrument do you think he used?" Markham put the question.

"His walking stick, most likely. You may have noticed it has an enormous gold knob perfectly constructed as a lethal weapon.* Incidentally, I'm inclined to think he exaggerated his gout to attract sympathy and to shunt any possible suspicion from himself."

"And the suggestion for the Sprigg murder?"

"After Robin's death he may have deliberately looked about for Mother-Goose material for another crime. In any event, Sprigg visited the house the Thursday night preceding the shooting; and it was at that time, I imagine, that the idea was born. On the day chosen for the gruesome business he rose early and dressed, waited for Pyne's knock at half past seven, answered it, and then went to the park—probably through the archery-room and by way of the alley. Sprigg's habit of taking daily morning walks may have been casually mentioned by Arnesson, or even by the lad himself."

"But how do you explain the tensor formula?"

"The professor had heard Arnesson talking to Sprigg about it a few nights before; and I think he placed it under the body to call attention—through association—to Arnesson. Moreover, that particular formula subtly expressed the psychological impulse beneath the crimes. The Riemann-Christoffel tensor is a statement of the infinity of space—the negation of infinitesimal human life on this earth; and subconsciously it no doubt satisfied the professor's

* It was discovered later that the large weighted gold handle, which was nearly eight inches long, was loose and could be easily removed from the stick. The handle weighed nearly two pounds and, as Vance had observed, constituted a highly efficient "black jack." Whether or not it had been loosened for the purpose to which it was put, is of course wholly a matter of conjecture.

perverted sense of humor, giving added homogeneity to his monstrous conception. The moment I saw it I sensed its sinister significance; and it substantiated my theory that the Bishop murders were the acts of a mathematician whose values had become abstract and incommensurable."

Vance paused to light another cigarette, and after a moment's thoughtful silence continued.

"We come now to the midnight visit to the Drukker house. That was a grim *entr'acte* forced on the murderer by the report of Mrs. Drukker's scream. He feared the woman had seen Robin's body thrown to the range; and when, on the morning of Sprigg's murder, she had been in the yard and met him returning from the kill, he was more worried than ever that she would put two and two together. No wonder he tried to prevent our questioning her! And at the earliest opportunity he attempted to silence her for all time. He took the key from Belle Dillard's handbag before the theatre that night, and replaced it the next morning. He sent Pyne and Beedle to bed early; and at half past ten Drukker complained of fatigue and went home. At midnight he figured that the coast was clear for his grisly visit. His taking the black bishop as a symbolic signature to the contemplated murder was probably suggested by the chess discussion between Pardee and Drukker. Then again, it was Arnesson's chessman, and I even suspect him of telling us of the chess discussion to call attention to Arnesson's chess set in case the black bishop should fall into our hands."

"Do you think he had any idea of involving Pardee at that time?"

"Oh, no. He was genuinely surprised when Arnesson's analysis of the Pardee-Rubinstein game revealed the fact that the bishop had long been Pardee's nemesis. . . . And you were undoubtedly right about Pardee's reaction to my mention of the black bishop the next day. The poor chap thought I was deliberately ridiculing him as a result of his defeat at Rubinstein's hands. . . ."

Vance leaned over and tapped the ashes from his cigarette.

"Too bad," he murmured regretfully. "I owe him an apology, don't y' know." He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and, settling back in his chair, took up his narrative. "The professor got his idea for Drukker's murder from Mrs. Drukker herself. She expressed her imaginative fears to Belle Dillard, who repeated them at dinner that night; and the plan took shape. There were no complications to its execution. After dinner he went to the attic and typed the notes. Later he suggested a walk to Drukker, knowing Pardee wouldn't remain long with Arnesson; and when he saw Pardee on the bridle path he of course knew Arnesson was alone. As soon as Pardee had walked away, he struck Drukker and tipped him over the wall. Immediately he took the little path to the Drive, crossed to 76th Street, and went to Drukker's room, returning by the same route. The whole episode couldn't have occupied more than ten minutes. Then he calmly walked past Emery and went home with Drukker's note-book under his coat. . . ."

"But why," interposed Markham, "if you were sure that Arnesson was innocent, did you make such a point of locating the key to the alley door? Only

Arnesson could have used the alley on the night of Drukker's death. Dillard and Pardee both went out by the front door."

"I wasn't interested in the key from the standpoint of Arnesson's guilt. But if the key was gone, d' ye see, it would have meant that some one had taken it in order to throw suspicion on Arnesson. How simple it would have been for Arnesson to slip down the alley after Pardee had gone, cross the Drive to the little path and attack Drukker after the professor had left him. . . . And, Markham, that is what we were supposed to think. It was, in fact, the obvious explanation of Drukker's murder."

"What I can't get through my head, though," complained Heath, "is why the old gent should have killed Pardee. That didn't throw any suspicion on Arnesson, and it made it look like Pardee was guilty and had got disgusted and croaked himself."

"That spurious suicide, Sergeant, was the professor's most fantastic joke. It was at once ironical and contemptuous; for all during that comic interlude plans were being made for Arnesson's destruction. And, of course, the fact that we possessed a plausible culprit had the great advantage of relaxing our watchfulness and causing the guards to be removed from the house. The murder, I imagine, was conceived rather spontaneously. The professor invented some excuse to accompany Pardee to the archery-room, where he had already closed the windows and drawn the shades. Then, perhaps pointing out an article in a magazine, he shot his unsuspecting guest through the temple, placed the gun in his hand, and, as a bit of sardonic humor, built the

house of cards. On returning to the library he set up the chessmen to give the impression that Pardee had been brooding over the black bishop. . . .

"But, as I say, this piece of grim grotesquerie was only a side-issue. The Little-Miss-Muffet episode was to be the *dénouement;* and it was carefully planned so as to bring the heavens crashing down on Arnesson. The professor was at the Drukker house the morning of the funeral when Madeleine Moffat brought the flowers for Humpty Dumpty; and he undoubtedly knew the child by name—she was Drukker's favorite and had been to the house on numerous occasions. The Mother-Goose idea being now firmly implanted in his mind, like a homicidal obsession, he very naturally associated the name Moffat with Muffet. Indeed, it's not unlikely that Drukker or Mrs. Drukker had called the child 'Little Miss Muffat' in his presence. It was easy for him to attract her attention and summon her to the mound by the wall yesterday afternoon. He probably told her that Humpty Dumpty wanted to see her; and she came with him eagerly, following him under the trees by the bridle path, thence across the Drive, and through the alley between the apartment houses. No one would have noticed them, for the Drive is teeming with children at that hour. Then last night he planted in us the seed of suspicion against Arnesson, believing that when the Little-Miss-Muffet notes reached the press we would look for the child and find her, dead from lack of air, in the Drukker house. . . . A clever, devilish plan!"

"But did he expect us to search the attic of his own home?"

"Oh, yes; but not until to-morrow. By then he would have cleaned out the closet and put the typewriter in a more conspicuous place. And he would have removed the note-book, for there's little doubt that he intended to appropriate Drukker's quantum researches. But we came a day too soon, and upset his calculations."

Markham smoked moodily for a time.

"You say you were convinced of Dillard's guilt last night when you remembered the character of *Bishop Arnesson*. . . ."

"Yes—oh, yes. That gave me the motive. At that moment I realized that the professor's object was to shoulder Arnesson with the guilt, and that the signature to the notes had been chosen for that purpose."

"He waited a long time before he called our attention to 'The Pretenders,' " commented Markham.

. "The fact is, he didn't expect to have to do it at all. He thought we'd discover the name for ourselves. But we were duller than he anticipated; and at last, in desperation, he sent for you and beat cleverly round the bush, accentuating 'The Pretenders.' "

Markham did not speak for several moments. He sat frowning reproachfully, his fingers tapping a tattoo on the blotter.

"Why," he asked at length, "did you not tell us last night that the professor and not Arnesson was the Bishop? You let us think——"

"My dear Markham! What else could I do? In the first place, you wouldn't have believed me, and would most likely have suggested another ocean trip, what? Furthermore, it was essential to let the professor think we suspected Arnesson. Otherwise, we'd

have had no chance to force the issue as we did. Subterfuge was our only hope; and I knew that if you and the Sergeant suspected him you'd be sure to give the game away. As it was, you didn't have to dissemble; and lo! it all worked out beautifully."

The Sergeant, I noticed, had, for the past half hour, been regarding Vance from time to time with a look of perplexed uncertainty; but for some reason he had seemed reluctant to give voice to his troubled thoughts. Now, however, he shifted his position uneasily and, taking his cigar slowly from his mouth, asked a startling question.

"I ain't complaining about your not putting us wise last night, Mr. Vance, but what I would like to know is: why, when you hopped up and pointed at that plate on the mantel, did you switch Arnesson's and the old gent's glasses?"

Vance sighed deeply and gave a hopeless wag of the head.

"I might have known that nothing could escape your eagle eye, Sergeant."

Markham thrust himself forward over the desk, and glared at Vance with angry bewilderment.

"What's this!" he spluttered, his usual self-restraint deserting him. "You changed the glasses? You deliberately——"

"Oh, I say!" pleaded Vance. "Let not your wrathful passions rise." He turned to Heath with mock reproach. "Behold what you've got me in for, Sergeant."

"This is no time for evasion." Markham's voice was cold and inexorable. "I want an explanation."

Vance made a resigned gesture.

"Oh, well. Attend. My idea, as I've explained to you, was to fall in with the professor's plan and appear to suspect Arnesson. This morning I purposely let him see that we had no evidence, and that, even if we arrested Arnesson, it was doubtful if we could hold him. I knew that, in the circumstances, he would take some action—that he would try to meet the situation in some heroic way—for the sole object of the murders was to destroy Arnesson utterly. That he would commit some overt act and give his hand away, I was confident. What it would be I didn't know. But we'd be watching him closely. . . . Then the wine gave me an inspiration. Knowing he had cyanide in his possession, I brought up the subject of suicide, and thus planted the idea in his mind. He fell into the trap, and attempted to poison Arnesson and make it appear like suicide. I saw him surreptitiously empty a small phial of colorless fluid into Arnesson's glass at the sideboard when he poured the wine. My first intention was to halt the murder and have the wine analyzed. We could have searched him and found the phial, and I could have testified to the fact that I saw him poison the wine. This evidence, in addition to the identification by the child, might have answered our purpose. But at the last moment, after he had refilled all our glasses, I decided on a simpler course——"

"And so you diverted our attention and switched the glasses!"

"Yes, yes. Of course. I figured that a man should be willing to drink the wine he pours for another."

"You took the law in your own hands!"

"I took it in my arms—it was helpless. . . . But

don't be so righteous. Do you bring a rattlesnake to the bar of justice? Do you give a mad dog his day in court? I felt no more compunction in aiding a monster like Dillard into the Beyond than I would have in crushing out a poisonous reptile in the act of striking."

"But it was murder!" exclaimed Markham in horrified indignation.

"Oh, doubtless," said Vance cheerfully. "Yes—of course. Most reprehensible. . . . I say, am I by any chance under arrest?"

The "suicide" of Professor Dillard terminated the famous Bishop murder case, and automatically cleared Pardee's reputation of all suspicion. The following year Arnesson and Belle Dillard were married quietly and sailed for Norway, where they made their home. Arnesson had accepted the chair of applied mathematics at the University of Oslo; and it will be remembered that two years later he was awarded the Nobel prize for his work in physics. The old Dillard house in 75th Street was torn down, and on the site now stands a modern apartment house on whose façade are two huge terra-cotta medallions strongly suggestive of archery targets. I have often wondered if the architect was deliberate in his choice of decoration.